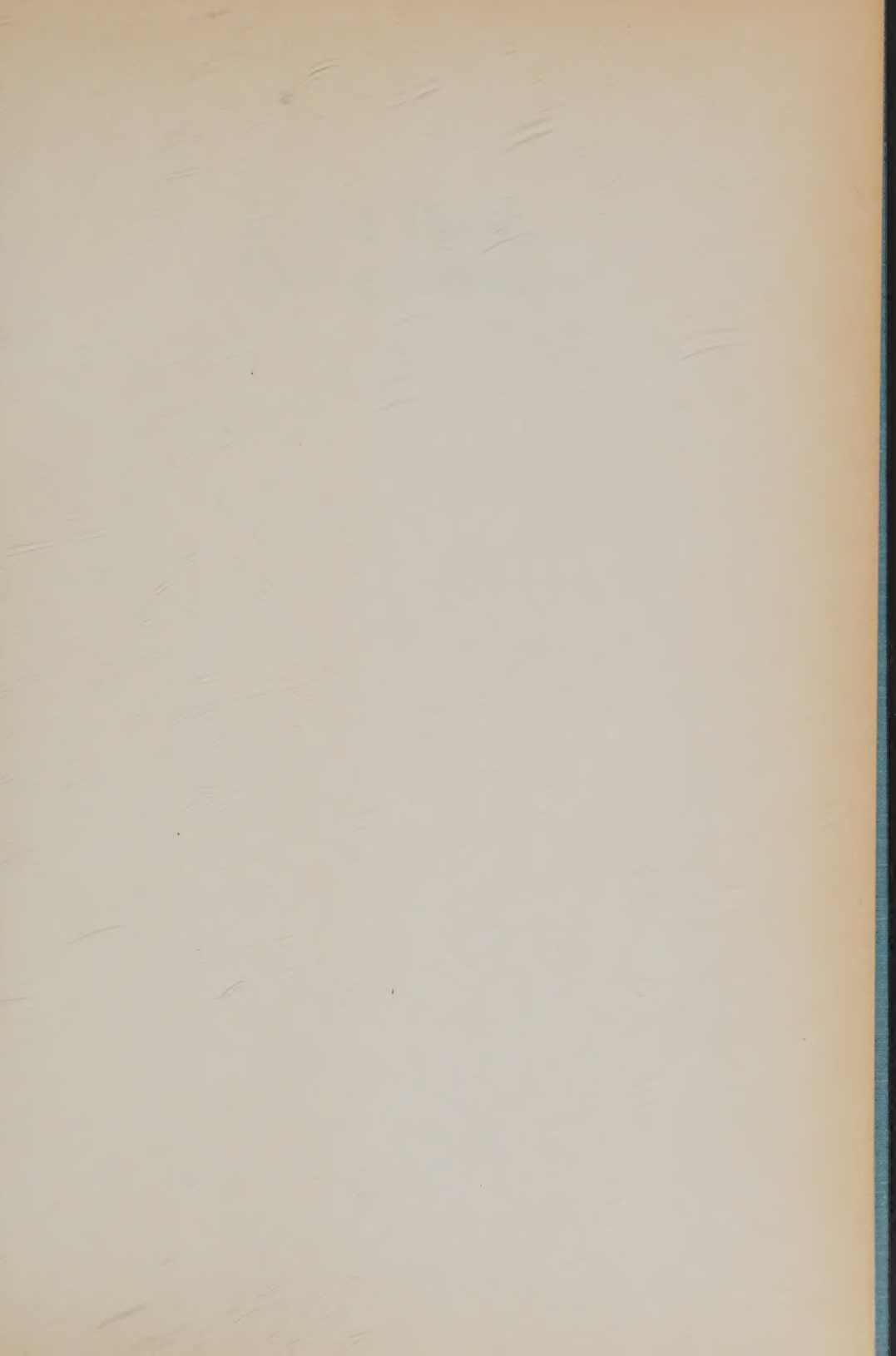




More Than Conquerors

More Than Conquerors

*A practical exposition of
Hebrews 11*

Rev. Gerrit H. Kersten

"Wherefore seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us."

—Hebrews 12:1

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PREFACE

In the work, *More Than Conquerors*, Rev. Gerrit H. Kersten instructs us biblically, doctrinally, experientially, and practically from the well-known “heroes of faith” chapter of Scripture: Hebrews 11. His lessons are numerous and timely; his warnings, vivid; his admonitions to seek grace to flee to Christ alone, inescapable.

Rev. G.H. Kersten (1882-1948) was very influential in founding and leading the Netherlands Reformed Congregations (Gereformeerde Gemeenten). He received (until his death in 1948) the necessary grace of God to use his talents and gifts in leading these congregations biblically and firmly through his preaching; extensive writing, including the editorship of a Dutch denominational paper for 23 years (“De Saambinder”); as instructor of the Theological School for the training of students in preparation for the ministry, as well as exercising his influence to establish many schools to educate children on the foundations of God’s Word and the three Forms of Unity based on that Word—the *Heidelberg Catechism*, the *Canons of Dort*, and the *Belgic Confession of Faith*. He was active in promoting the sound Reformed truth and its unchangeable principles in all areas of life, especially in political life in the Netherlands.

Rev. Kersten was also a prolific writer. All ninety-eight publications that came from his pen are composed with conviction and clarity. His pen authenticates the definitive “thus saith the Lord” of Scripture. It is our prayer that this edificatory work on Hebrews 11 may serve to the conversion of many sinners, the edification and encouragement of God’s children, and the glory of God’s worthy Name.

We wish this valuable work wide distribution. We wish to wholeheartedly thank Rev. J.C. Weststrate and Mrs. Gertrude DeBruyn for translation assistance; Garret Moerdyk, Mrs. Laurena Quist, and John Wesdyk for proofreading assistance; and Gary den Hollander for proofreading and typesetting. May the Lord bless the reading of this volume to the hearts and lives of young and old.

On behalf of the Netherlands Reformed
Book and Publishing Committee,
Dr. J.R. Beeke

CHAPTER I

Saving Faith

"Now faith is the substance of things hoped for."

—Hebrews 11:1

In Hebrews 11 Paul deals with true, saving faith, and the Apostle gives us a long list of witnesses who by faith have become more than conquerors. No one reading this chapter attentively can doubt this. But still there are some who have the opinion that this precious chapter of the Epistle to the Hebrews speaks only of temporary and miraculous faith. How they can come to such an opinion is a mystery. Just read the opening words; those words describe nothing else than saving faith. "Faith is the substance of things hoped for."

Moreover, this is evident from the whole argument of the Apostle in this Epistle. Paul stirs up the Hebrews to be steadfast in the faith. They had to withstand many onslaughts, and frequently were in great danger. Their legalistic teachers were enemies of the Gospel, and were inclined to contend with the liberty of the New Covenant and to draw them to the old Mosaic dispensation, threatening to lead them away from seeking their redemption in Christ alone. Therefore the Apostle showed again and again that the glory of Christ exceeded that of Moses, and that of the Priest of the Old Testament. Nothing must prevent the Hebrews from seeking their salvation in Christ alone, not even the persecutions which were threatened. Has not the church by faith been more than conqueror? That is the faith which overcomes the world because it is the *substance* of things hoped for, a firm, unfailing ground because it unites with Christ and lives out of Christ, the Fountain of life.

It might be beneficial to write something here about saving faith, especially because there seem to be some strange and soul-damaging opinions of faith which contradict what our fathers have confessed in accordance with the Word of God.

Faith then is wrought in the elect by the Holy Spirit in regeneration. Is it necessary to state what we mean by regeneration? Must we tell you that this new birth does not happen at the time

of justification in the conscience when the soul receives the assured consciousness that he is reconciled with God in Christ? In our days some suppose this to be so, contrary to the confession. For in our fathers' controversy with the Arminians they confessed very emphatically: "God by the efficacy of the regenerating Spirit pervades the inmost recesses of the man; He opens the closed, and softens the hardened heart; He circumcises that which was uncircumcised. He infuses new qualities into the will, which though heretofore dead, He quickens. From being evil, disobedient, and stubborn, He renders the will good, obedient, and pliable; He actuates and strengthens it so that, like a good tree, it may bring forth the fruits of good works.

"And this is the regeneration so highly celebrated in Scripture, and denominated as the new creation: a resurrection from the dead, a making alive, God working in us without our aid. But this is in no wise effected merely by the external preaching of the Gospel, by moral suasion, or such manner of thinking, that after God has performed His part, it still remains in the power of man to be regenerated or not, to be converted or to continue unconverted. It is a supernatural work, most powerful, and at the same time most delightful, astonishing, mysterious, and ineffable; not inferior in efficacy to creation or to the resurrection from the dead." Let us cleave to this doctrine of the truth so that we are not carried about with every wind of doctrine.

In the quickening of a dead sinner, in regeneration, God plants true saving faith in the soul. And that is the second matter we must emphasize: *faith unites the soul to Christ*, and makes her a partaker of His benefits. Therefore, the Catechism speaks of the essence of faith in Lord's Day 7, "True faith is not only a certain knowledge, whereby I hold for truth all that God has revealed to us in His Word, but also an assured confidence, which the Holy Ghost works by the Gospel in my heart; that not only to others, but to me also, remission of sin, everlasting righteousness and salvation, are freely given by God, merely of grace, only for the sake of Christ's merits." Hence, the form for the Administration of the Lord's Supper says that we must examine ourselves, not only whether we abhor ourselves because of our sins, but also whether we believe this faithful promise of God that all our sins are forgiven us only for the sake of the passion and death of Jesus Christ, and that the perfect righteousness of Christ is imputed and freely given to us as our own, yea, so perfectly, as if we had satisfied in our own persons for all our sins, and had fulfilled all righteousness.

What then? Is the Holy Supper only for established Christians? Certainly not! This is very evident in the form. To hold to this opinion would be contrary to the character of the Lord's Supper, which is to strengthen our faith, our weak faith. Both the

Catechism and the form for the Lord's Supper speak of the essence of faith, not of a certain degree of faith. But then the appropriation of Christ and His benefits belongs to the essence of faith; which means that he who lacks the confidence that all his sins are forgiven for Christ's sake, lacks faith. He is dead, and unregenerate.

For many, however, there is much darkness about this matter. Alas, many who cannot deny that life in the world has become death for them; who have learned to justify God's righteousness, even though He would condemn them forever; who with Ruth were privileged to make the choice, "Thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God," yes, more, for whom the way of redemption has been opened, are often in great anxiety whether they are truly partakers of Christ. How far they are from having confidence that their sins are forgiven for Christ's sake! Their debt is still unpaid; the justice of God demands, and there is no escape without satisfying that righteousness. Oh, that they might receive that acquittal! They fear that at death they shall still lack all things, and since there are but two ways, *in* or *outside* of Christ, they must often conclude that they are still outside of Christ, and He has not yet assumed their debt.

And yet, they are no strangers of faith. Already when they were under conviction they sometimes felt as if the heavy burden of their sins fell away, when they had to bow under the justice of God, or when the invitation of the Word of God came to them, "Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters," or when Christ revealed Himself to them in His full all-sufficiency and glory. Yes, then they believed, then they had to believe that God had begun with them, and that there was reconciliation in the blood of Christ. Then they sometimes cried out, "Lord, now I shall never doubt again." But often this lull is of short duration, and then they are concerned again about that one matter, whether their sins are truly forgiven for Christ's sake. They cannot and dare not say so. But when faith is in exercise, as we have just mentioned, what else is it but an embracing of Christ which works peace and gladness in their souls, even though they themselves do not yet have as full a light upon the affirmation of the Holy Spirit as has been worked in more exercised people.

The solution lies in this: we must differentiate between the *habit* and the *exercise* of faith. The godly Comrie, who is not read enough, teaches so clearly: "We call faith an infused habit or power in order to distinguish it from all others, and to show its true origin and nature." That does not mean that faith must be counted among the natural habits, or those habits developed by exercise, for it is an infused ability, the gift of God, says the Apostle (Eph. 2:8), by which we are saved. So we must distinguish between faith and

believing. Our confession of faith also teaches this. It does not diminish the essence of faith that we frequently miss the exercise of faith, or that we cannot believe and are in significant doubt. The regenerated sinner who is incorporated in Christ by an implanted faith has in the fruits the evidence that the essence of faith is a knowledge and a confidence. It is the firm foundation upon which he is preserved from falling out of the state of grace because God's counsel is unchangeable, and Christ's merits and intercession are complete. This ground is also in every believer, namely, their being in Christ by this faith that is wrought in them, not as a passing act but as a habit that produces the acts. If this incorporating took place by an act, it would remain as long as the action lasted, but as soon as it ceased the incorporation also would cease. But this is not the case. Therefore our fathers spoke so strongly about faith in connection with the union with Christ; hence faith is the substance of things hoped for.

This cuts off much which is thought to be faith, but lacks the essence of faith. It is very sad that many build themselves and others upon impressions in the conscience, tenderness of heart, visions and Psalm verses, without ever having any true knowledge of, or confidence in, Christ. Do be careful lest imagined faith causes us to face death without a Surety for our guilt and sins, for then we shall be eternally lost.

From this doctrine we also conclude that each of us must seek faith in Christ. The habit of faith must become reality.

Oh, that among God's people there were more and more a running the race to win Christ, and a losing of the grounds of all that is outside of the only Savior. Then we would clearly understand that faith incorporates us into Christ and accepts all His benefits. On the other hand, what a comfort lies in this doctrine for all God's people! Those who are united to Christ can never be lost because the Lord will keep His work alive.

May the light then arise in our hearts so that in communion with Christ we may agree with the words of Paul: *"Faith is the substance of things hoped for."*

CHAPTER II

The Living Hope

"Now faith is the substance of things hoped for."

—Hebrews 11:1

Since we are giving a brief description of living hope, the difference between faith and hope should first be considered. Paul sets love (charity) which never faileth above them both, differentiating both faith and hope from love; as also in our text faith and hope are presented as two benefits. The difference lies in this, that faith draws to itself the benefits God has promised. It accepts and appropriates them, while hope reaches out to the distant benefits and expects them to come from afar. Faith is as a telescope to draw the most distant benefits of salvation to the soul; hope causes the heart to go out after the benefits of the Covenant, that are far off, desiring and expecting them according to God's promise. Faith and hope differ in respect to the present and the future. Faith grants God's people a right of ownership of Christ and of all the benefits of salvation, both for time and eternity. Faith causes the soul to rest upon what God has done, while hope reaches out to what God shall still do according to His promise. As often as faith embraces the promises of God, it causes the soul to rest in the fulfillment Christ has wrought. In that exercise of faith the church may sing continually:

*Thou art my God, I will extol Thee,
And magnify Thy majesty.*

Hope, however, persuades the soul that God will do what He has promised, however impossible it seems, for He is not a son of man that He should lie. Faith causes the soul to rest; hope reaches out in lively desire for the fulfillment of the promised good. Thus hope is also an infallible expectation, a strong longing for that good which the Lord has promised, a stronger longing than that of those who watch for the morning.

This lively hope finds its ground in faith. In the text we are now considering Paul teaches us that faith is the substance of things hoped for. If then true faith is lacking, our hope shall be as a spider's web which shall be cut off. Many seem to comfort them-

selves in such a deceitful hope. They hope things will turn out well with them. They are not serious about being converted; they still have enough time. They build their hope upon their youthful but very transitory strength. Many hope for the best, and continue as they are even to their deathbeds, building upon their baptism and their making confession. Their over-confidence, which is repeatedly evident when they hope for heaven and glory in Jesus with their mouth, is most frightening. Under a Christian banner they serve all that is of the world, justifying their way of life. With their "strong" faith, they are more averse to the experience of the saints than to the pleasures of the world. But still they hope for heaven and expect soon to enter glory. Others have had some deep impressions in their conscience, about ten, twenty or forty years ago and through fear of death spent some anxious nights. But it all disappeared and never resulted in a true deliverance; rather, they hope and cling to a straw that will soon break.

Another asks, "Is there then not hope as long as there is life?"

Yes, indeed, because as long as one lives there is a possibility of being saved. But this does not mean that if we continue as we are that we can have a hope for salvation; we must be regenerated. Where the godly sorrow that works repentance to salvation is lacking, there is no other prospect but eternal damnation. How terrible shall their awakening be when all their hope shall perish because they lacked the firm foundation of true faith!

Living hope is built upon faith. God planted faith in the soul of His people, and awakened the hope that the Lord will fulfill the promises He has given in His Word. This hope, resting on faith, is infallible and shall obtain the benefit hoped for.

This lively hope is *a habit infused* by God, by which we with patience and diligence surely expect to receive of God the benefits He has promised for the future. The natural man cannot obtain that true hope by his own efforts; God instills it into the soul by means of the Word, which is the seed of regeneration. By this hope God's people expect salvation in Christ Jesus. Therefore men often speak of the expectation of that which they do not yet possess. "For what a man seeth, why doth he yet hope for? But if we hope for that we see not, then do we with patience wait for it." The Lord opens the blind eyes and grants a blessed knowledge of Himself, His service, and the salvation of His saints. By this knowledge love is kindled in their hearts, so that they learn to seek the benefits of God's children above all that is in the world. It makes them cry out, "Oh, how great is Thy goodness, which Thou hast laid up for them that fear Thee!" Then their hope falls upon God's promises. They may hope upon His Word which He opens and applies to the soul. The Lord Himself speaks His Word to them, and however much this promise may be assaulted, hope causes the soul to expect the

salvation promised, and that so strongly that all doubts must flee. Hope locks out doubt.

Nevertheless, there is often sad doubt in the hoping sinner. God's way of fulfilling the promise of salvation often goes through impossibilities. All those things end in death. "We trusted," said the doubting travelers on the way to Emmaus, "that it had been He which should have redeemed Israel." But that hope seemed in vain, for Christ had died, and that had remained such a riddle for them. Nevertheless, that is the way it had to go. The grain of wheat had to fall into the ground and die in order to bring forth fruit. Ought not Christ to have suffered these things, and to enter into His glory? Ought not all that is of us fall away, so that God shall have all the glory? But then hope can be so shaken in us. However, then the Lord calls, "Though it tarry, wait for it; because it will surely come, it will not tarry." When that hope rises, our soul says with Micah, "I will look unto the Lord; I will wait for the God of my salvation: my God will hear me."

This hope reaches out to the very greatest *objects*. To name just one: these hoping sinners expect the Lord Himself. By divine revelation they have learned to know that they miss God. Their soul can be satisfied with nothing but God alone; their heart thirsts after the living God, "as the hart pants after the water brooks." The Lord revealed Himself to them as the God of salvation, He drew their heart, yes, He quickened their hope upon His grace. Oh, then they cried out with David, "On Thee do I wait all the day." They wait on Christ as their Surety and Savior so that they might be found in Him.

They hope upon God's promise, to be delivered not only from their internal but also their external needs. Their afflictions are many. Sometimes they come into deep waters where the floods overflow them. Then they sometimes complain with the church of old, "My way is hid from the Lord, and my judgment is passed over from my God." Then their hope is cast upon the Lord, that He will plead for them and maintain their cause. Their anxious souls hope upon divine support. One word of His mouth is enough to make them trust securely in Him. Against all sins that dwell in them they seek their sanctification by the blood and Spirit of Christ, and hope for deliverance from all their iniquities. Yes, that lively hope reaches out to perfection, to the city that has foundations, whose Builder and Maker is God. Oh, that living hope can strengthen them in their struggles and in their adversities! They shall not last forever. "Why art thou cast down, O my soul? and why art thou disquieted within me? Hope thou in God: for I shall yet praise Him, who is the health of my countenance, and my God."

These things God's people hope for; in a word, all that is necessary for time and eternity, for in His Word God has promised

His people full deliverance. And that hope causes them to wait for it with patience, for the Lord will come in His own time.

Still that hope does not make us sit down idly, but on the contrary, it causes us to seek after the things hoped for. "I follow after, if that I may apprehend that for which also I am apprehended of Christ Jesus," says Paul. If faith were more active in this way among God's people, their hope would be stronger, and doubt would flee more and more. To that end it is necessary, in the first place, to hate and flee from sin. Longing for God and longing for the world cannot go together. How then shall we wait on the Lord, and have a lively hope upon Him, if He does not occupy the highest place in our hearts?

In that hope there will be a strong pleading for the promised salvation. The postponement of it often troubles the soul. How many times the poet of Psalm 13 says, "How long?" "How long wilt Thou forget me, O Lord? How long wilt Thou hide Thy face from me? How long shall I take counsel in my soul? How long shall my enemy be exalted over me?" What a sad case it is when God's people grieve so little about the postponement of the promised salvation! The hope of faith causes the soul to cleave to the Lord and to search for the reasons why the Lord tarries so long. On the other hand, true hope cannot give up. Against hope they believe in hope. "Though He slay me, yet will I trust in Him," says Job.

This true hope is only for God's children. An unconverted soul has no ground for this hope. "But God according to His abundant mercy has begotten us again," says Peter, "unto a lively hope." Oh, may it arouse you, who still lack true faith! Cast away your vain hope that has no foundation. You can expect nothing but perdition, nothing but eternal death. Look upon God as your Judge. Submit to Him. May He lead you to Christ, in whom alone salvation for your soul is to be found. Make haste to the city of refuge, lest soon when death comes, your hope fails, and you must enter eternity in despair. I have stood at deathbeds of people who had "a little hope" for many years, and with that they flattered themselves that all was well, but they were in the most terrible despair when death came. Their awful screams and fearful cries to their relatives often still resound in my ears. Should we not admonish one another to seek that eternal ground of salvation in Christ, so that our hope will be built upon nothing else but Him? For certainly the hypocrite's hope shall perish. "When a wicked man dieth, his expectation shall perish: and the hope of unjust men perisheth."

But God shall give the hope of the righteous—that hope which makes not ashamed because the love of God is shed abroad in the heart. May faith more and more appropriate Christ and His benefits; then hope would be stronger against all doubts that so often seek to control us. But would the Lord not fulfill His Word? Should

our hearts not hope upon that Word? May the blessedness of God's dear favor and precious communion captivate us more than all that is in the world. Certainly then we could more often lift up our heads and reach out to that happiness which the world does not know.

That hope is a strong comfort in all our crosses and changes. It causes us to bear our cross with courage. "For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that shall be revealed." For it is but a light affliction, which is but for a moment, to which we are subjected in this life. May that hope gladden our hearts more. Paul says, "Rejoice in hope"—in the lively hope upon the goodness laid away for them that fear Him. "Hopeful" held "Christian's" head above water in the Jordan of death. In all warfare, even in the warfare of death, hope shall give strength in fellowship with Him who conquered eternally.

Now the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that ye may abound in hope through the power of the Holy Ghost.

CHAPTER III

Faith is the Substance

"Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen."

—Hebrews 11:1

In the first two chapters we tried to shed a little light on the difference between faith and hope. These two considerations were used to precede the actual discussion of the first verse of Hebrews 11, which we shall now attempt.

To better understand the argument of the Apostle in this chapter, it is necessary to search the connection in which these words are found. For that matter, in order to understand the Scripture it is always necessary to consider where the Lord placed the words, and not to take them out of their context, lest we make an entirely wrong application of the Word of the Lord.

The Apostle writes to the believing Jews who liked to be called Hebrews, for that name pointed to their election and calling in Abraham when he crossed the Euphrates. These Hebrews were threatened by very serious dangers. On the one side, they were attracted by the old dispensation and, on the other, a very fearful persecution distressed them. In all the churches the Jewish element contended against the liberty of the Gospel. The question of how much power the Mosaic laws still had, and also whether Israel's Old Testament privileges were still valid, brought very great difficulties. The Apostolic Council at Jerusalem had solved this problem in principle, but many could not agree with that solution. They still adhered strongly to the sanctuary in Jerusalem, and to the entire Mosaic law. They would even bring the heathen under the guardianship of Judaism; how much more would they, in their own circle, hold fast to the hope that Israel, as the people of God, would attain glory and come to a general conversion. But nothing came of that general conversion. Rather, Israel worked out its own damnation. The attitude of those who would not bow to Christ became more and more hostile. Nothing came of erecting the throne of David in a literal sense. These facts destroyed the false hope of many Hebrews; they became weak in

doctrine and in life. They were in danger of returning to the weak and beggarly elements. To this was added, on the other hand, the oppression to which these Hebrews were exposed because of the enmity of their own rulers.

The Apostle knows their dangers. What shall become of them when Jerusalem shall soon fall by the hands of the heathen? One thing they must do: they must abandon the old dispensation, cease from it entirely, give up their wrong, carnal, sinful expectations, and find their salvation only in Christ, the Mediator of the New Testament. He is more than the angels, worthy of more honor than Moses, greater than Joshua, and surpasses Aaron. This the Apostle teaches in the Epistle to the Hebrews. The entire dispensation of the New Covenant far transcends that of the Old. For this doctrine to be truly understood, the Hebrews must look away from Moses' shadowy dispensation, and, at the same time, be strengthened to bear the strong opposition of the Jews' bitter enmity. To do so, however, it was necessary for them to draw life out of Christ by faith. And of that faith the Apostle gives a description in the eleventh chapter. By numerous examples, he shows that from the beginning of the world many have conquered the greatest opposition and struggles by faith. Would the Hebrews then lag behind? God forbid. With all that is in him, the Apostle tries to draw them from the dangerous way that, as it were, lay before them, and concludes his argument with a word that is as encouraging as it is serious: "Wherefore seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us" (Heb. 12:1).

In this chapter then, the Apostle sets faith before us in its persevering power. It is not so much the faith that justifies the soul in Christ of which the Apostle is speaking here (although justification is attained by the same faith), but the writer of this Epistle seeks to keep the readers from errors and to harden them as soldiers for the battle by teaching them, by many examples, the power of true faith in gaining eternal victory. For about four thousand years prior to that time all-conquering faith was visible to the church in many ways. Whatever changes came, also in the dispensation of the church of God, faith remained the same, and by that faith, the godly fathers embraced the promises and obtained eternal salvation. Would the Hebrews then forsake this faith for the law, surrender it because of the oppression connected with the way of believers? Is not faith then the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen?

Two things we must especially keep in mind from the argument of the Apostle. In the first place, it is necessary to be removed from the law as the ground of our life in order to live in Christ. It

is our nature to seek life out of the law. The word of the law, "Do this and thou shalt live," is so attractive for us that we forsake Christ for it. The reason for it lies in this, that we do not know our spiritual state of death, even though we confess it according to the Scripture, unless God the Holy Spirit reveals it to us inwardly. And even those people convicted by the Lord need that continual, effectual uncovering to flee by faith to Christ alone and to build upon Him. Must we not seek one of the causes why Christ receives so little glory from His people in the fact that there is so little true abandoning of the law? Many have found "life in their own hand," and there is no cry, "There is no hope!" How then can the glory of Christ shine through their souls? Yes, it is to be feared of many that they shall fall back upon the dregs of their own righteousnesses instead of breaking through to Him who alone gives access to the Father by faith. Oh, that the Apostle's glorious description of faith may draw us to lose all things, and as an entirely lost sinner, to have no other ground left but Jesus Christ and Him crucified. Oh, that the north wind may awake and blow upon the garden of the church, so that we may give more and more diligence to make our calling and election sure!

In the second place, in this argument lies comfort for God's people in all their oppressions and adversities. These adversities will not last for ever; one day God's people shall receive the victory, the eternal victory over oppression, adversities, enmity, death, and hell. Oh, you that fear the Lord, be of good courage! We have a cloud of witnesses lying about us. Faith cannot fail, for it is the substance of things hoped for, and the evidence of things not seen.

The things hoped for are the things God has promised both for this life and the one to come, for the salvation of His people. They lie in the future and are anticipated by God's people with a lively hope and a firm confidence. They are not yet actually enjoyed, but their faith compensates for the lack of full enjoyment, for by faith they exist in the believer, are known by him, and are enjoyed as if they were present. Therefore faith is both the substance of things hoped for, and also the evidence of things not seen. For the believer the things not seen exist in faith. God revealed those things in His Word and promise; and in the appropriation of the promise lies not only the pledge of the promised benefit, but also a revelation and knowledge of it. In the promise, God makes His people partakers of the promised benefit; faith embraces and rests in the Promiser who cannot lie, and that so firmly and surely, that doubt is excluded and the believer, by faith, has the substance of things hoped for and the evidence of things not seen.

Faith causes the believer to live in those hoped for and unseen benefits. For this is characteristic of faith, that in contrast to all kinds of speculative knowledge, it gives the soul an actual enjoy-

ment of the promised benefits, as Abraham by faith saw the day of Christ and was glad. This spiritual joy is the nourishment of God's children which firmly convinces them of the truth, however intense the assaults may be. Hoping upon this firm foundation of faith, David said, "I shall never be moved." However great the benefit may be which is promised to a condemnable sinner, by faith God's people embrace it, and appropriate it. How shall we understand anything of those things that are hidden from the wise and prudent, except by true saving faith? Constantly thousands waver in a faith that is overturned by the assaults of so-called science, because their faith gives no actual existence of the things in them, and therefore it is only a superficial assent of the truth to which the corrupt understanding agrees. Here lies the dividing line between historical and true saving faith, namely, that true faith carries in it the evidence of the existence of unseen things.

God is the invisible One, but faith knows Him and convinces us internally of His existence. Let the atheist mock and deny God. Let all the enemies of free grace reject Christ, slight the Holy Spirit, mock with spiritual and eternal life, and call it foolishness to accept the existence of something that cannot be seen, faith, in the existence of the invisible, is a stronger evidence than anyone can give for the evidence of things not seen. This characteristic of faith exercises such power in the people of God that it guards them against falling away and preserves them to eternal salvation.

Oh, that we might know by faith the things God has revealed in His Word, and might carry about in us the evidence of things not seen so firmly by the continual exercise of faith that we might glory in tribulation and live in the assurance that neither tribulation, nor distress, nor persecution, nor famine, nor nakedness, nor peril, nor sword shall separate us from the love of God in Christ. For faith never wavers. It is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.

CHAPTER IV

Faith an Evidence of Things Unseen and an Explanation of the Origin of Things Seen

"Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen. For by it the elders obtained a good report. Through faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the Word of God, so that things which are seen were not made of things which do appear."

—Hebrews 11:1-3

Things which are not seen are spiritual and eternal things. We can see the material creation: heaven and earth, sun and moon, stars and clouds, the world and those that live in it, the sea and its fulness. But the spiritual things can not be seen; Paul is thinking of these unseen things that confirm us in our confession and cause us to persevere in it.

Unbelief may go so far that it rejects unseen things, but in faith lies the evidence of things not seen. It is foolish, willful blindness to reject the existence of God because we cannot see God, to state that neither the soul nor eternity exist, or that there is no heaven or hell because we never saw anything of all this. You know the dreadful language of the self-hardened worldling who mocks with death and perdition because he never saw anybody return from there. He does not believe in those "scare tactics" of hell and damnation. People know better now; we in our days are much more "enlightened." The unbeliever wants to see while he closes both eyes. He demands to see the invisible, referring to spiritual and eternal existence; he wants to see God. The existence of God, spiritual and eternal things must be proved. But although those who hate God and His Word proclaim the most foolish theories, they do not demand to see them; they just accept them as the fruit of a "sound mind."

Poor worldling! Proud fool!

Does the existence of a thing depend upon whether we with our puny, darkened mind can prove it? Do you want to prove there is a God, whose revelation in His Word you reject, and to whose works you willfully shut your eyes? Will you prove there is a God by making Him material, visible and tangible? But then He would cease to be God; then He, the only eternal, true God would have to become an idol like so many that the God-rejecting world worships. Do you want to make the existence of God an arithmetic problem which you can prove, as you can prove that $2+2=4$? But then do you not sense the dreadful pride of your existence, the sheer absurdity of such reasoning? What is a god whom you can prove? You stand above anything that you can prove. If you are worshiping a god whom you can prove, you have a product of your own making, not a god as the object of your worship. How can it be otherwise than that the world of materialism is sinking away in idolatry, in the grossest idolatry, which we see round about us in all kinds of foolish forms.

Do you want evidence, incontestable evidence, for the things not seen? The Apostle gives it to you in Hebrews 11: "Faith is the evidence of things not seen." Faith is an evidence that God exists; that the soul exists and is created for eternity; that there is a heaven and a hell, and whatever other unseen things exist. With holy seriousness I ask your attention for this statement of the Apostle.

So many waver. So many of our boys are shaken by the confrontation with the most dreadful denials of "unseen things," so many of our young girls are drawn along into the world. Unbelief is instilled into the school, the shop, the factory, the office, in short, into every part of society. It is our bounden duty to protest strongly against unbelief that draws us away from God and religion; it is the moral obligation of parents and of all other educators. I have often asked myself, "Do we pay enough attention to this matter, this matter of such great importance?" Or is this only a minor matter? Is God the only and the true God, in distinction from all idols, or is He not? Does man have only a temporal existence, or is he created for eternity? Are the problems concerning heaven and hell small problems? And if not, if they are the most important of all earthly questions, I ask again, are we then free, as ministers in giving no heed to them, we as teachers in passing over it? We seek to Christianize everything, but where is our faith?

Do away with your "Christianized" singing, football, cricket and whatever other societies you have. Do away with your Young People's Societies if you come together to discuss subtleties instead of subjecting yourself to God's Word in childlike obedience and seeking the confirmation of your confession! Be concerned about your Christian schools! Do our teachers believe the doctrines of our

church? Do many teachers of the high schools and colleges still believe the Bible? Or does Greek mythology have as much value for them as the Word of God? Often boys have come to me whose faith had been shaken at Christian High School or College; who received no answers to their questions from the teachers. I do not say, no satisfactory answers, but no answers at all. Often no attempt is made to save them from the claws of unbelief and to protect them from falling away. Alas, where are we going? Prove that God exists, that man goes to his long home, that heaven or hell awaits us; prove it incontestably, not with hollow reasoning of which everyone can feel the emptiness, but as Hebrews 11 teaches, "Faith is the evidence of things not seen." Let the Word of God keep its value for you. Wake up, parents, for the sake of the salvation of your children; gird yourselves for the battle! Let zeal revive for the truth of God at home, in church and at school. May it be given to us—to us and our families—to all of us together, to remain with the Word of God and to reject all that opposes it. The things not seen have evidence in faith.

Also the origin of that which is seen is explained by that same faith. "Through faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the Word of God, so that things which are seen were not made of things which do appear."

Away then with your theory of evolution; away with Darwin's theory of descending from apes. How is it possible that any one can give any credence to such foolishness! Why would you rather believe what is unproved, namely, that everything developed of itself, without God, than believe what the Word of God tells us so clearly, that God created, produced out of nothing, and called into being the things that are not as though they were, so that the things which are seen were not made of things which do appear. Creating is producing something out of nothing. Creation is the work of God. Everything came into being by a single act of His will. He spake, and it was done. God's Word teaches us the origin of the material world, and by faith we understand that it is so. No learned man who rules out God shall rob us of it. We do not cast away the Word of God for the foolish theories of man. May the Lord prevent us from doing so.

But then we must subject ourselves to the Word unconditionally, and not to the opinions of Dr. Geelkerken! Genesis 1,2, and 3 relate historical facts. God created; in six days God prepared heaven and earth; out of Adam's rib God gave a woman; He placed two special trees in Paradise. They actually existed, as well as did the serpent through which Satan spoke. Here it is not proper to spiritualize. It is reality. The dreadful actuality of sin, as well as the glory of God, are here described. And for us only one thing is necessary—unconditional subjection. God has said it and there-

fore it is so, and not otherwise. Faith, and faith alone, can help you to understand the origin of things; faith which gives God the honor. Indeed, faith is a gift of God. He caused you to live under His Word. He persuaded you of the truth of His testimonies; at least historical faith has been given you. And although historical faith is insufficient for salvation, it is nevertheless indispensable. And where is mankind going if even historical faith is lacking? We will then sink back into heathendom.

*While He proffers peace and pardon,
Let us hear His voice today,
Lest, if we our hearts should harden,
We should perish in the way.*

—Psalter 255:4

I wish to bind men to the Word of God; I want myself, and you with me, to be persuaded that God's Word solves problems, that faith is the evidence of things unseen and understands the origin of things, so that the God-dishonoring theories of evolution and all connected with it and the despising of the Word and Church do not increase.

And still we may not build the hope of salvation upon a conscientious understanding of the truth. It is to be feared that many mistake their historical faith for saving faith, and mislead their souls. Appreciate it that you and your children may still live under the Word; esteem it highly as evidence that God is still laboring with you and yours when you are not carried away with the stream of unbelief, but for your eternal salvation, seek more than agreement with a known truth. Seek true faith that leads to salvation.

That faith knows and acknowledges God. The Lord wants to make Himself known to a lost sinner. He desires to be the God of salvation; He gives Himself to a lost sinner, and causes him to enter into His communion by faith. This knowledge by faith is life eternal. Let the world be full of atheists; faith itself is an incontrovertible evidence that God exists. His service is a service of perfect bliss. By faith the heavens are opened and a salvation is known which the eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, nor has it entered into the heart of man. Wonders of grace! In faith God gives evidence of the things not seen, and causes us to find in the matter which He has created reasons to praise Him eternally.

*Let heav'n above His grace and glory tell,
Let earth and sea and all that in them dwell;
Salvation to His people God will give,
And they that love His Name with Him shall live.*

By that faith, "the elders obtained a good report." That good report given of them in Scripture proves the truth of the saying of the Apostle, "Faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence

of things not seen." The Holy Spirit could never have given them this testimony if they had not been given to exercise faith, as it is here described by Paul in its character and nature.

"The elders" are all the true believers from Adam to the last one in the old dispensation. All those elders have departed, but in their life and death they indeed are an evidence for the church of the New Covenant of the nature of faith. For God has testified of them; that was their privilege. The world does not have much that is good for God's people. In the world those who fear God are usually despised lamps; scorn and insult are usually their portion here. But what a privilege it is that God knows His own, and acknowledges them as His people. That is their honor. Christ, the eternal Son of God, was not ashamed to call them brothers. Oh, people of God, let this comfort and encourage you: "He hath not despised nor abhorred the affliction of the afflicted, but when they cried unto Him, He heard." For they are God's property, purchased by the blood of Christ; well-pleasing to God, since by faith they are partakers of reconciliation and cleansing from sin in Christ. Faith alone is then the means by which we can please God, not as if faith were a meritorious work, but because faith causes us to enter into Christ, and in Him to exist before God.

May the Lord grant us to receive that faith, and to be much in the exercise of that faith, so that we may please God in the mortifying of sin and by walking in Christ.

CHAPTER V

The Sacrifice of Faith

“By faith Abel offered unto God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain, by which he obtained witness that he was righteous, God testifying of his gifts: and by it he being dead yet speaketh.”

—Hebrews 11:4

After the Apostle had in the first three verses of this chapter explained the nature of faith and described its power, he enriches these thoughts with the many examples of those who have testified of this faith. He presents a list of heroes of faith by name who fill us with admiration, not only for the acts of faith which they have done, but also because they are choice examples of this numberless multitude. Does the Apostle clearly make us feel that he has not tried to make a register of the generation of God's elect, that he has not attempted to name all God's children who by faith entered into glory? How could that be accomplished? Who can number God's elect? Their register lies in the hand of God; their names are written in heaven, and no man has been given the privilege of reading all the names. Paul also is very conscious of this. He himself says that the number of those who have given evidence of the power of faith is infinitely greater than those he mentioned.

He exclaims, “And what shall I more say? for the time would fail me to tell of Gideon, and of Barak, and of Samson, and of Jephthah; of David also, and Samuel, and of the prophets.”

Therefore our attention is the more drawn to the choices he makes out of so many who by faith have witnessed that they were righteous. Many have taken offense at the composition of this list of witnesses of faith. “Do all of these belong here?” they ask. Is it right that people such as Rahab, a harlot, and Samson and Jephthah, were numbered among the heroes of faith? Perhaps they could be numbered among the children of God, but to give them a place among the choicest of the believers, . . . for many that was going too far. On the other hand, many names were omitted that were more worthy to be named than these. Foolish, hostile son of man!

Shall the sovereignty of God remain a stumbling block for you?

The Lord chooses so entirely differently from what we do. He passes by those upon whom our eyes are fixed and takes those whom we count the least. He lifts up His work and His people out of the depths of sin, contempt, and oblivion, and gives testimony to His glorified grace. We can learn this by a single look at the list of witnesses whom Paul mentions in Hebrews 11, beginning with Abel.

Cain and Abel were brothers, sons of one father and one mother; children of Adam, begotten after the fall, in his own likeness, after his image. That image was the image of fallen man, who no longer bore the image of God. By sin that image had been lost; it was destroyed in Adam and Eve, and also in their posterity. For in that one Adam all fell, also Cain and Abel.

By nature there was no difference between these two brothers; both were equally dead in sins and trespasses, inheritors of eternal condemnation. The difference that we shall learn to know in them is only the fruit of the grace of God, just as that grace differentiates all God's people from worldlings. They can glory in nothing at all. What have they that was not given to them? Grace, sovereign grace alone, draws the line of demarcation between them and those who work out their own destruction. Oh, when God's children may receive by faith a true realization of this sovereign grace of God, how their soul sinks away in adoration to sing with the poet: "Thy sovereign grace is e'er our fortress and our tower."

It was grace that caused the difference both inwardly and outwardly in the lives of Cain and Abel. This was evident in so many things; even in choosing an occupation, their ways separated. Cain became a tiller of the ground, and Abel a shepherd. Was God's guidance not evident also in this matter? Later Scripture tells us of two other brothers whose work separated them: Esau and Jacob; and God's sovereign grace separated them with an eternal separation also. Through natural ways God executes His eternal counsel. Must not Abel by faith bring a bloody sacrifice? Does not the Lord guide the ways of His people also in temporal life, or is grace entirely separate from temporal life? Certainly not! May it be very clear to us as in Abel, and may it fill our hearts with adoration as we see how God has led us in our education, in our chosen work, the schools we attended, the knowledge and experience we gained; all that and much more was guided by the Lord, and used by His grace, to the glory of His Name. Thus God also guided Abel's way so that by faith he would bring Him a bloody sacrifice.

No, a ceremonial law did not exist in the days of Abel. That was given twenty centuries later on Mount Sinai. But still there was already a sacrifice that pointed to Christ. God Himself clothed man with the skins of animals. Slaughter took place to cover man's nakedness; one day blood would be shed to cover the elect before

God. To this shedding of blood the Lord referred in the first promise. The Seed of the woman would bruise Satan's head, but Satan would bruise His heel. Without the shedding of blood there is no remission of sins. It is this that God Himself has revealed to man from the beginning. The bloody sacrifice which Abel brought had a deeper meaning than the unbloody offering of Cain. The offering differed as did the source from which it was brought.

The source was the main thing. Scripture does not ascribe value to the offering in itself as we are taught here in distinguishing these two brothers. The reason God accepted Abel's offering did not lie in the externals. God desires truth in the inward parts. He tries the heart and the reins. He first looks upon Cain, then upon his offering; and again He first looks upon Abel, and then also upon his offering.

There is so much that looks alike in the offerings of Cain and Abel. They both built an altar; they both took of their substance; they both brought an offering unto the only true God who made heaven and earth. Cain also believed that God is the Almighty who sustains heaven and earth. Cain also acknowledged that the fruit of the field is given by God, and therefore desired to bring Him an offering. Cain was no atheist. The line of demarcation is drawn much closer than between religious people and atheists. Cain also did not desire to be without religion, but he lacked the true realization of sin and guilt, and, therefore, all saving knowledge of the Seed of the woman. How superficial such a religion is, how cold! There are such, also in our days, even in large numbers, who do not want to be called irreligious and deem God worthy of a sacrifice. But what kind of religion is theirs? What knowledge is there of the Word of God, of man's state of death in Adam? What a deplorable religion of Cain! A foolish adoration outside of Christ! What a dreadful lot awaits those who willfully blind themselves and hasten on in their own way! They are enemies of the God of all grace! Haters of the "truth that is in Jesus!" Religious without God! Awake, thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give thee light.

Abel is so very different. Broken under his guilt and sin, Abel's faith is not only fixed upon God as Creator, but especially on God as Redeemer, upon the Seed of the woman that shall bruise Satan's head. As one who is lost, as a son of Adam, he is gone out in faith to seek Christ, in whom alone he saw salvation. And that was expressed in the kind of offering he brought. Abel sacrificed by death and the shedding of blood, for one day Christ would deliver His people by death, bringing redemption through the price of His blood. Thus Abel reveals, contrary to Cain, the exercise of true, saving faith.

It is that faith which causes the lost sinner to flee to Christ.

How shall we ever desire Christ by faith if we are not an entirely lost sinner in ourselves? Does that mean that God only begins to work in a sinner when he truly feels his need of God and seeks Him? Not at all! I emphatically oppose that idea which some have recently accused me of maintaining. (I cannot think but that this accusation was out of enmity against experiential truth.) God finds the sinner in a state of death; as an enemy of his Creator and Maker; as one who does not want to be saved; as one who is cast out in the open field, an enemy of grace, who would rather be eternally lost than to deny all his own works and be saved in Christ. God quickens that lost sinner; God conquers that enemy by His eternal love; God the Holy Spirit cuts off that child of Adam out of the old tree, and implants him in Christ. But that work of God which we call regeneration, in which the sinner is passive; that quickening work which has no preparation, for there is no preparation before regeneration; that work of God which decides the state of a sinner to his eternal salvation, that is the work God wants His people to know and understand by faith. And if now the sinner is to come to Christ by faith, and know Him unto salvation, then that discovery, that persuading, that impoverishing, that cutting off by the Holy Spirit is necessary, causing him to lose everything but Christ and to flee to Him and to accept Him as He is given by the Father as the only cause of salvation.

How very sad it is that many of those who call themselves Reformed oppose this doctrine! They show themselves hostile towards inward life. They say "Such a discovery, such an experience of our misery is not necessary; we were born in the church; we have a Reformed confession; we attend the Lord's Supper; we believe." It is thought to be sickly if one seeks true discovering grace to be saved as a poor sinner; but that such a faith cannot be healthy which, estranged from true experience, does not differ from historical faith. Let an unceasing protest be heard against the superficiality of this doctrine. The fruit itself is bitter, as anyone can perceive in the "merry" Christendom of our day. But what is worse, thousands of souls are misled for the great eternity. Oh, cry out and do not refrain! There is but one true refuge in Christ through faith; it is that of which Scripture sketches us an example in Abel; it is that of God's poor people. They are lost in themselves, cut off from all the works of the law upon which the soul had hoped, brought to wit's end since there seemed to be no help or deliverance, and for these wretched ones Christ will be their Refuge and Deliverer. He Himself invites them, "Come unto Me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden." Not for a thousand worlds would God's people part with this exercise of faith which causes them to go out unto Christ, even if the fast-running Christendom of our day calls them sickly, for Christ calls them blessed:

“Blessed are the poor in spirit.” Their sacrifices are well-pleasing unto God.

“By faith Abel offered a more excellent sacrifice than Cain.” With what tenderness faith made its choice, for faith works by love. It cannot escape the notice of the attentive reader that God’s Word ascribes to Abel more carefulness in choosing his sacrifice than Cain displayed. For Moses writes thus: “And in process of time it came to pass, that Cain brought of the fruit of the ground an offering unto the Lord. And Abel, he also brought of the firstlings of his flock and of the fat thereof.”

Apparently Cain took what came to hand without making a particular choice. But Abel chose the best, the firstlings of his flock; he did not withhold from the Lord his best—“and of the fat thereof.” We repeat, it was not because of the greater value of the sacrifice that God had respect unto Abel, but faith alone gave value in the searching inquiry regarding the two sacrifices.

The Word of God tells us that faith is lively and tender when the soul is active. When Israel sinks away from Jehovah they bring the Lord the halt and maimed; and that is good enough. Even today the form and routine in church services show that there is a disinterestedness and coldness that is similar to Cain’s attitude. Where is the love, enthusiasm, and holy zeal for the house of God? Are churches not allowed to lie waste, while for themselves people demand a higher and higher standard of living? The world has a love for movies and theaters. Just look about you. They wait in long lines to be admitted, and gladly offer their hard-earned money for it. And what about those who go to church? Our boys and girls? Our older ones? Yes, many give “of the fruit of the ground,” but where are the “firstlings of the flock and of the fat thereof”? Does not the love of God constrain us to offer our best to the Lord? Should God’s people do less than the world? Has the widow died who cast her mite into the treasury?

Cain’s offering was form; his heart did not burn with the love of God. Even his choice for the offering was an evidence of it. Abel, on the other hand, offered a sacrifice by faith, and this faith considers God worthy of the very best. He parted with the “choicest” in love to Him. Oh, may the love for the truth be again stirred up among us! This will in turn draw us away from sin and from the world, check our pride and vanity, and will bind us closer to the Church and the truth. Above all, may God grant us that faith which made Abel offer a more excellent sacrifice than Cain, for without this true, saving faith it is impossible to please God.

By that faith Abel obtained witness that he was righteous, God testifying of his gifts. By that faith, he being dead yet speaketh. Hence, this faith in Abel bore two fruits: one that he enjoyed himself, witnessing that he was righteous; the other that remained

in the church after his death, that he being dead yet speaketh. God Himself gave this testimony. We are not told how this happened. The Apostle tells us that God testified of his gifts, and Moses only says, "And the Lord had respect unto Abel and to his offering: but unto Cain and to his offering He had not respect." The representation that the smoke of Abel's offering rose up, while that of Cain's went down, is merely human speculation. Neither is there any certainty that the Lord ignited and consumed Abel's offering with fire from heaven. What is certain is that God, in a manner that was perceptible both to Cain and to Abel, showed His approval of Abel and his offering and His disapproval of Cain and his offering. This made Cain very angry; his envy caused wrath. The glorification of God's sovereign grace, instead of leading to humiliation, led to the killing of his brother. In Esau we can observe the same thing; he swore to kill his brother Jacob. Cain became a murderer of his brother. Truly, it is a terrible thing when the sovereignty of God in saving sinners embitters us as it did Cain. In these two brothers the same warfare is displayed that is fought through all ages by those who were born after the flesh against those who were born after the Spirit (Gal. 4:29). All persecutions of the Lord's heritage find their beginning and root in this enmity against God's sovereign grace. Indeed, in Abel's death there is an allusion to the death of Christ. What else but hatred can God's people expect from the world? However "lovingly" Rome may act, it hates free grace, and, when it has the power, it persecutes those in whom this grace shines brightly. The warfare cannot be avoided, for God's sovereign good pleasure draws the line of demarcation. It manifests the sad decline and careless sleeping of the Church of God when she seeks peace with the world and joins hands with Rome.

May the north wind blow upon the garden, and may we be given a walk by faith which will receive the testimony of God's favor. That will mean more to us than life itself. What else was the evil done to Abel but a means of bringing him into eternal communion with His God, into uninterrupted enjoyment of the favor already shown him? And what shall all the violence of the world, the enmity of hypocrites, and the raging hatred by persecution of unbelief and superstition ever accomplish other than to cause God's people to partake more and more of the favor and communion of God? But may that favor then become precious to us above all else! May the Lord guide our ways so that He may have respect to us and to our offering.

Even after his death Abel speaks by faith. The Apostle now shows us this second fruit of faith. Abel's blood cried from the ground. This is not testified of any other person, and Paul here refers to the voice of that blood. The blood of Abel that was shed

cried for vengeance; it cried with all the blood that was shed unrighteously. Even if murderers remain unrecognized by people, God knows them and He hears the cry of the blood of the slain. The blood of His people especially cries to Him.

To that end the Holy Spirit tells us that Abel, being dead still speaks, so that God's people may know to their comfort that God shall avenge His own elect who cry day and night unto Him. As Abel's faith was an example for the Hebrews in Paul's days, let it be no less to the strengthening of the church of God in these days. Faith is such a firm foundation of things hoped for and an evidence of things not seen, that all suffering is bearable, and even death can be conquered by that faith. Poor, raging worldlings, haters of God and His people, one day you must yield. May the Lord humble your heart before Him as He humbled Saul of Tarsus before it shall be too late, and the upright shall have dominion over you in the morning.

Oh, blessed are those who are not strangers to that true faith which caused Abel to offer unto God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain! True faith justifies from sin because it unites with Christ and testifies of that justification. May it thus continue to work effectually in our hearts. May God give testimony by His Holy Spirit. Our sacrifice, zeal, and our virtue are no grounds upon which we can build. Faith rightly denies all this. We find in Christ alone all that can serve to our salvation. Then by faith all opposition shall be conquered and the most bitter sorrow shall not hurt us. God's approval is worth more than the most bitter sorrow. Just a little longer, and we shall conquer eternally with Abel by that faith which testifies even after death.

CHAPTER VI

Enoch

"By faith Enoch was translated that he should not see death; and was not found, because God had translated him; for before his translation he had this testimony, that he pleased God."

—Hebrews 11:5

Enoch was the seventh from Adam out of the generation of Seth. The human race divided itself into two branches. Cain's contempt of God's grace not only caused him to wander but caused a curse upon his house and his generation, while the Lord's blessing and grace was commanded upon Seth's generations according to His sovereign good pleasure. We should take this to heart, hating the paths of sin more and bowing our souls the more as we notice that we destroy not only ourselves but also our generations.

Did it ever draw your attention that Cain's generation was broken off at the eighth member, but the generation of Seth had the full ten? Count them: Cain, Enoch, Irad, Mehujael, Methusael, Lamech, Jabal (and his brother Jubal), Tubal-cain (and his sister Naamah). Seth's generation, however, continues for the full number, since the fulness of Christ is comprehended in it. Is ten not the number of completeness? In that matter it agrees with the number seven which you also find in the generations of Christ. Does not Matthew count three times fourteen generations (and does not seven lie in fourteen) from Abraham to Christ? Being full in Christ also lies in the generation of Seth and is expressed in the fulness of its members, numbering up to ten. It is written for us in Genesis 5: Seth, Enos, Cainan, Mahalaleel, Jared, Enoch, Methuselah, Lamech, Noah, Shem (and his brothers, Ham and Japheth). May we seek the fulness of Christ and His grace for us and our generations above the portion of the worldling, who with all his apparent pleasures shall be cut off.

Through the generation of Seth, Enoch is the seventh from Adam. Both the Old and the New Testaments speak of Enoch.

Genesis 5 tells us that he lived sixty-five years and begat Methuselah, whose age became greater than any other—nine hundred sixty-nine years. How short the days of Enoch were

compared to the days of his son, and even compared to others of his time! All those before Enoch became over nine hundred years old, except Mahalaleel who, however, became eight hundred ninety-five years old. The youngest of those of whom Genesis 5 speaks, besides Enoch, became more than twice as old as he, and reached the age of seven hundred seventy-seven. It was the pious Lamech. Was it a judgment of God that Enoch's days were so few? We know better. "Enoch walked with God after he begat Methuselah three hundred years, and begat sons and daughters: and all the days of Enoch were three hundred sixty and five years: And Enoch walked with God: and he was not; for God took him." It was not a judgment, but a blessing. There was a special favor in Enoch's departure. Even death had no power over him; he was taken up with body and soul into eternal glory. That is what Moses tells us.

The New Testament shows us Enoch as a prophet, for in his General Epistle Jude writes in verses 14 and 15: "And Enoch also, the seventh from Adam, prophesied of these, saying, Behold, the Lord cometh with ten thousands of His saints, to execute judgment upon all, and to convince all that are ungodly among them of all their ungodly deeds which they have ungodly committed, and of all their hard speeches which ungodly sinners have spoken against him."

So Enoch prophesied, and the contents of his prophecy was the expected judgment of the wicked. It is not unlikely that all the holy fathers before the deluge prophesied and preached as the Lord gave them to testify. For we also read of Noah that he was a preacher of righteousness (2 Peter 2:5). His preaching was indicative of comfort; his preaching was an invitation to come to Christ, an urging by the Gospel, while it is still called today. Noah urged the souls who now are in the eternal prison (1 Peter 3:19) to flee to the righteousness of Christ. And the rejection of his preaching was a contempt of the deliverance in the promised Seed of the woman, to the judgment of the world.

Enoch, however, prophesied of the judgment; in his voice we hear the thunder of God's wrath. He calls to the wicked that God is coming with ten thousands of His saints to execute judgment! The terror of the Lord must persuade men to believe. Enoch is so fully convinced of the judgment that is approaching that he names his son Methuselah, which means, "When he dies, there shall be destruction." The life of Methuselah will still testify, but then the end will come.

Through the ministries of Enoch and Noah, by law and gospel, by threatening with judgment, and by sweet invitation to salvation, the Lord strove with the first world. But they refused to hear, and were destroyed in the flood.

Shall God spare us if we neglect so great salvation? If His judgments do not break us, and His blessings do not humble us; if

neither law nor gospel have power any more, tell me, oh nation, each for yourself and your family, what will become of you? In flaming fire God shall take vengeance on them who obey not His voice. Let Enoch tell us, "Behold, the Lord cometh with ten thousands of His saints, to execute judgment upon all, and to convince all that are ungodly among them."

Perhaps you had another concept of the holy piety of Enoch than that which Jude gives us. We like to hear of a quiet, pious, separated life that here and there earns some respect in the world. But that he walked piously in childlike fear of God, walked with God, and opposed the stream of life with the thunder of the coming judgment, no, that we do not like; we had not thought that of Enoch. But God the Holy Spirit testifies of him that he walked with God, even three hundred years after the birth of Methuselah while he begot more sons and daughters, and at the same time Scripture says that he cried out against the wicked of his day, who were many, and prophesied of the approaching, righteous judgment of God. Let the world then scorn, despise and hate, Enoch prophesied.

People of God, behold your calling! Sadly, you are silent too much. The power of the world is so very strong, the battle is so all-inclusive, and the hope of victory is so small. Let us not forget to consider that the inclination of our hearts is to withdraw ourselves so easily into solitude, into our own circle; we can too easily let the wicked go their own way. "Cry aloud, spare not." Let there be a crying out, as Enoch's, because of the coming judgment that is awaiting everyone when he shall appear before God — a judgment that is threatening nations and peoples because they are increasingly forsaking God. Prophecy by means of a careful, humble walk, in the hope that one day you shall be given your soul for a prey.

Enoch obtained the salvation of both his soul and his body. Paul repeats what Moses had already told us: "And he was not found, because God had translated him." But the Apostle further describes this translation, saying, "Enoch was translated that he should not see death." Without doubt Enoch was taken up into eternal glory with soul and body. Later Scripture tells us of Elijah who ascended into heaven. One day, when the day of days has come, there will be people still dwelling on earth, and then all those who are living shall be changed in a moment, without dying. That change will cause the mortality of our body to put on immortality, and the corruptible to put on incorruption. This body now subject to death shall obtain an eternal existence, so that it shall be able to bear either the judgment of condemnation or the blessedness of the righteous for all eternity. Then there shall be no more death; God's people shall be given full, uninterrupted salvation.

Enoch received that full salvation when God took him. He was prepared for heaven. There is not a word here about purgatory.

What more do those who have been washed in the blood of Christ need? They have made their clothes white in the blood of the Lamb.

Oh, people of God, keep courage. In Enoch the Lord desired to show you the eternal salvation prepared for you. Soon, when your race is run according to the soul, and one day also according to the body, no sinful inclination shall draw your flesh away, no disease shall hinder you, no scarcity of words shall be an impediment to your tongue any more. Your corrupt body, corrupted as it has been by sin, shall become like unto the glorious body of Christ. Then we shall be forever with the Lord! May the Lord comfort and strengthen you, and give you courage to bear your sicknesses, weaknesses, and tribulations. Soon we will be above all these infirmities, to sing forever the triumphant song of the multitude of those who have been bought with the blood of Christ, a multitude so great that no man can count them. Does not that salvation captivate our hearts? Should not our eyes be directed to the day of Christ's return? Should we not cry out with the Spirit and the bride, "Come, Lord Jesus, come quickly." Let our conversation be more in heaven from whence we look for our Savior.

As Abel was the first of the martyrs, and Adam the first of all people to die a natural death, so Enoch was the first to be taken up wonderfully into glory. Was it because God wanted to snatch him away from the claws of the enemies who hated his piety and sharp preaching? Was it to let Enoch triumph over the generation of Cain which hated God and His people? It is remarkable! The seventh from Adam out of Cain sang the song of the sword; the seventh out of Seth preached God's righteousness. As Cain rose up against Abel, so Cain's family could have arisen against this righteous one who was given the sword of God's Word. But never fear! God took him away. No enemy could ever approach him again.

This is written, people of God, for your comfort in the midst of all the enmity you experience for the Lord's sake. God hides His people in various ways. Enoch is taken up with soul and body into glory; and one day your soul, and on the last day your body also, shall enter into glory. However the way may vary, God saves His people out of the claws of the enemy; He hides and delivers them in this life, and soon shall cause them to triumph in death which is swallowed up in victory. Take courage, children of God, and sing the song of victory:

*God's unrelenting enemies
No peace shall find in earth or seas;
His people shall triumphant go
Victorious over every foe.*

The "translation" of Enoch from this earth into eternal glory was not essentially different from his life. Out of a walk of obedi-

ence and faith Enoch was translated into blessedness, into uninterrupted, eternal communion with God. In few but significant words Scripture describes Enoch's life in this world, "Enoch walked with God." However, this had not always been his walk, for Moses limits it to the three hundred years after he begat Methuselah. Is that mentioned to help us understand that Enoch did not have this walk of himself, nor performed it in his own strength?

For sixty-five years Enoch did not excel in a pious walk. Only after Methuselah's birth he was given that sovereign grace which caused him to share in God's communion in such a special way. Thus even in those earliest days, in the oldest list of those known by God, it was evident that only grace can save our souls from death. All God's children learn to understand that nothing of man himself can enable them to climb to that great height of living in God's blessed communion, and from the beginning to the end it is only free grace that moved God to permit condemnable creatures, sons and daughters of Adam, to live in His blessed presence. For three hundred years Enoch enjoyed that privilege upon earth in a very special way. Even in the life of God's children there are widely varying times, and it seems that God used the birth of Enoch's first son as a special means to draw him upward and to fill him with His salvation.

Moses gives that blissful walk the full emphasis by repeating in Genesis 5:24, "And Enoch walked with God"; and in the Epistle to the Hebrews we are told, "Before his translation he had this testimony, that he pleased God." In both texts the same thing is said, that Enoch pleased God in his walking with Him.

That walking with God was a walking in Christ by faith. Enoch was also a son of Adam; Enoch also belonged to the generation that, in breaking the covenant, fell away from God, and, in the father of mankind and the head of the covenant, willingly cast himself under God's curse and wrath. Also for Enoch, as for every child of man by nature, God is a consuming fire and everlasting burning, with whom no sinner can dwell. God's children learn to know this by discovering light. An irreparable breach separates them from God their Maker. But then how is it possible to walk with God, to have communion with Him? How else can it be but in Christ, who stood in the breach and filled it, and in whom the sinner is reconciled with God.

Also in Enoch's walking with God Scripture teaches us about the promised Seed of the woman. To be saved, to be reconciled with God, and to enjoy God's sweet communion; all these are only possible through Him. He who lacks Christ, lacks all and can never meet God in peace. But he whose life is found in Christ has access to God by a new and living way which He has consecrated by His blood. That His people partake of God's favor, and meet God's

kindly face are the rich fruits of the merits of Christ's suffering on the cross, and are enjoyed by faith through His glorification. The fire of God's wrath is quenched. Oh, that the church of God in our days might realize this more! How much more hunger and thirst after Christ there would be! Now take your attention away for a moment from all those who, with their conditions, tears, and deliverances, but without the true fear of God, desire to include themselves among those who fear God; look away from all of them. One day God shall uncover them and send them away with those terrible words, "I never knew you." No one can withstand those words. But fasten your thoughts upon those who have truly learned to know their sins and, in their sorrowful condition, have learned to flee to the living God. Think of those who may taste the comfort of the Gospel, and whose souls have been refreshed by the grace of God. Take notice then how little concern there is among those people in general to win Christ, and to be placed in actual reconciliation and communion with God, which causes them to rest in that rest which remains for the children of God. Only in communion with Christ lies the foundation for walking with God, and pleasing Him.

The Apostle declares that Enoch had this testimony that he pleased God. God has no pleasure in anything that is of natural man. The carnal mind is enmity against God; for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be. But in the ministry of the blessed High Priest God's elect are sanctified, and are made pleasing to God, both in their person and in the things they accomplish by faith. The Lord declares, "My delight is in her." His Church is a royal diadem in the hand of God. "There is no spot in thee," the Lord says to the bride who is black but comely. However misformed she is by sin, the Church is glorified in Christ and is presented to the Father as a chaste virgin, without spot or wrinkle.

God is of purer eyes than to behold evil, and cannot look on iniquity. How could He have communion with something that is imperfect? Does light have communion with darkness, or life with death? Well then, no more can a holy and righteous God be pleased with what is imperfect in man. But in the all-cleansing ministration of Christ God's people are perfect, and their prayers, works, and walk become pleasing to God. God looks upon His people through the agate windows of His covenant. In this way Enoch pleased God. And God testified of it to him here below, before his translation.

Concerning Abel, Scripture declares that God had respect unto Abel and to his offering; concerning Enoch it declares that he pleased God and had testimony of it. Is it of small concern that the Lord testifies to our souls of His pleasure in us? There is no doubt remaining but that God will behold His people in Christ, and shall love them with an unchangeable, eternal love.

That grace becomes even greater for us as we may receive its testimony from God by faith. Now I return once again to the urgency of resting only in Christ, and not sitting still until we can testify, "He is mine and I am His." For also in the fruit, there is something of that testimony of grace by which those people are pleasing to God. Although the taste of that fruit is sweet, knowledge remains dark, and confidence in Christ remains hidden for the soul himself. Yet that would honor the Mediator as Savior; there God's attributes are satisfied to our salvation. There the soul receives the peace that passes understanding. Then the law does not curse any more, Satan does not accuse the sinner any more before God; sins are cast into a sea of eternal forgetfulness, and the separation between God and us is healed. Oh, that testifying of the Father's love; that being united with Christ; that sealing of the Holy Spirit! It is as if the Triune God wants to cause that redeemed sinner to partake of His favor. The elect soul is there embraced in love and whatever had made a breach is all gone. "He shall rest in His love."

For three hundred years Enoch could walk in the exercise of that faith. Do you see that we must let God be sovereign? Who has told you that you must disturb God's people in their enjoyments of faith; that you must distress that life by declaring that it shall not last, that there will be other times? I have known some among God's people who, from the time they were set free, could rejoice in this love day by day; for many long years and in all their afflictions, they could praise God because the Lord was near them. Instead of caviling, our hearts should feel a holy longing for such a life. Enoch walked with God for three hundred years. The form Moses used for the verb "walking" indicates a continual repetition of the action. Thus, Moses is saying that Enoch walked up and down with God.

With shame we must admit that we do so little of such walking. God does not forget His people and He is not a land of darkness, nor a wilderness, but, people of God, are there not big gaps between the times when we may meet God? Are there not interruptions in our walking with God? Have we not known better days than now? Oh, that we might be stirred up to seek Enoch's portion! Enoch walked with God, and he received this testimony that he pleased God three hundred years, and he begat sons and daughters. His was no life of artificial piety, far from it. It was a life consecrated to God and, in Christ, acceptable by faith.

What enjoyment lies in living by faith! Is it not therefore called a walking by faith? Tell me, what does the world give? It may seem strange, but it is true as Moses says, that the strength of our days is labor and sorrow.

Poor worldling, who neither knows nor seeks anything but what is here below: Behold the bliss of God's children. May your

eyes be opened to be jealous of the life of Enoch, so that for such a life you would be willing to give up the world and all that belongs to it and would learn to find your happiness for time and eternity in the favor of God. Here you lack true satisfaction, and soon, when your end comes, you will perish even as the first world perished under the judgment of God.

How blessed then are God's people! Let all that is in the world be against them, God is for them, and He crowns them with His blessings.

Well then, people of God, may the testimony Enoch received cause us to rest by faith in Christ alone, and teach us to die to self, that we may please God, declaring with the poet,

*But unto Thee, my God on high,
'Tis good for me that I draw nigh;
I'll trust Thee, Lord, through all my days,
And publish all Thy works and ways.*

CHAPTER VII

Pleasing God by Faith

"But without faith it is impossible to please Him: for he that cometh to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of them that diligently seek Him."

—Hebrews 11:6

In the sixth verse the Apostle makes application of what he has just stated, namely, that Enoch was translated by faith, and also by faith had the testimony that he pleased God. Without faith these two benefits were not to be obtained; and Paul teaches us emphatically that at whatever time and in whatever circumstances we may find ourselves, only by faith can we please God. The negative form in which the Apostle speaks is the strongest affirmative, as can be seen clearly in many places of Scripture. Christ says, "Without Me ye can do nothing," teaching not only the utter dependence of His children upon Him, but also their ability to do all things through Christ who strengthens them. Now the Apostle speaks also negatively, "Without faith it is impossible," but then he teaches us that only by faith we certainly do please God.

Throughout all ages many have tried to please God without faith. Among them, Cain was the first, and God rejected him and his offering. And how many among those who profess the truth have no more than Cain had! Israel, which followed after the law of righteousness, hath not attained to the law of righteousness. Why not? Because they sought it not by faith, but as it were, by the works of the law. For they stumbled at that stumbling stone, as it is written, "Behold, I lay in Sion a stumbling stone and a rock of offence: and whosoever believeth on Him shall not be ashamed." Faith is the principal thing. What does our religion mean without faith? Can we give anything to God? "If I were hungry, I would not tell thee: for the world is mine, and the fulness thereof. Will I eat the flesh of bulls, or drink the blood of goats?" And without faith the offerings were nothing more than the flesh of bulls and the blood of goats. All our desires, good intentions, and best works are as filthy rags, and do not please God except when perfected by Christ through faith. Basically, we strive with God in our will-worship, as Cain who was angry with God. It is natural for us to

demand wages for our work, to ascribe merit to our acts, "Wherefore have we fasted, and Thou seest not? Wherefore have we afflicted our soul and Thou takest no knowledge?" And what does the Lord answer? "Behold, in the day of your fast ye find pleasure, and exact all your labors." Indeed, there shall be some who in the day of judgment will say, "Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Thy Name? and in Thy Name cast out devils? and in Thy Name done many wonderful works?" And then will I profess unto them, "I never knew you. Depart from Me, ye that work iniquity."

Nothing of ourselves can please the Lord, not even those acts which God may reward with temporal blessings, as, for example: Ahab's humbling himself, whereupon God postponed the judgment; Nineveh's repentance, which led to the saving of that mighty city. Nevertheless, however scrupulous our lives may be; however much we may seek to conform to God's demands—never, no, never, can we please God without faith. Is it not the rule that God first looks upon the person, and then upon his work, as with Abel? Must we not first be renewed and cleansed in Christ in order that our deeds may be pleasing to God? How can a natural, loathsome creature, whose heart is a bitter fountain, a well of iniquity, yield anything that is pleasing to God? First make the tree good, and then its fruit will be good. All our own works are nothing in God's sight. Become a guilty, condemnable sinner before God even with all your best works; learn to see yourself in the blinding light of God's perfections so that you may confess that you have never for a moment been pleasing to God, that you are nothing by nature but an object for hell, in order that you may seek Christ by faith.

For without faith it is impossible to please God. This is the dividing line; here is the root of the enmity between Cain and Abel, of Rome against the truth, of the Arminian against the Reformed doctrine, of the almost-Christian against the true people of God until this day, yes, to the end of time. God's children grieve in sadness over their imperfections and sincerely ask, "Lord, when have we done so?" On the other hand, he who walks in his own strength and tries to serve God with what he is, demands that he shall be rewarded for his works, for his good thoughts, and for his good intentions. He despises the self-degrading doctrine and preaching of free grace. He can hardly control his anger, when he, with all that is of self, is rejected. And still, "without faith it is impossible to please God: for he that cometh to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of them that diligently seek Him."

"He that cometh to God" approaches Him by calling upon the Lord in His favor through Christ Jesus. But no one comes to God in that way unless he has learned to know himself in his lost state and has a lively realization of it. Why would we ever come to God if we did not feel ourselves separated from Him, and could not see

anything but death outside of Him? Whoever we may be, whether we are taken out of the midst of the world, or whether we are living irreproachably, religiously and piously—we need the true uncovering by the Holy Spirit to cause us to flee to God as a wretched sinner. When that uncovering is not present, we hew out cisterns for ourselves, broken cisterns that can hold no water, and we forsake the Fountain of living water.

To such miserable creatures God is willing to give access to Himself. He draws them with the cords of lovingkindness. Otherwise none would come to Him. For, however greatly we feel our misery or the need of redemption in Christ, the sense of our guilt, sin, and unworthiness will prevent our approaching to God who is a devouring fire and everlasting burnings with whom the sinner cannot dwell. But the Lord allures the troubled sinner by His promises, of which Christ is the center. These promises are embraced by faith. When understood by faith, the opening of the Gospel and the urgent invitation of grace, “Ye who have no money, come ye, buy, and eat,” conquers all fear and opposition and draws the soul to God so that it comes, although very troubled, to seek the favor of God in Christ. And it is never otherwise than by faith, leaning upon the merits of Christ, that the sinner comes to God, that he may be accepted by Him according to the riches of His grace. This is what Cain lacked, but it was the life of Enoch. Such coming is so very characteristic of faith that faith itself is often called in Scripture a coming to Christ, or coming to God.

He who comes to God must then believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him. Believing that God is, is more than just not being an atheist. Nature itself agrees that God is, for God placed in the heart of each person an impression of His existence. But the mere acknowledgment of the existence of God is entirely insufficient to make us come to Him. Even the devils believe that God is, and they tremble. Cain also believed there was a God, yes, that He was a rewarder, but Cain lacked true faith in God. The faith that the Apostle demands of everyone who comes to God causes the sinner to assent and trust that God is a God of grace and salvation. Thus when the Lord spoke, “I am the almighty God,” Abraham not only saw God’s omnipotence, but he believed that this almighty God was his protector in whose care he was safe and before whom he could walk. How deep an insight God gave Moses into His most blessed Being for the good of His people when the Lord revealed Himself in the burning bush as the “I AM,” existing not only as the eternal God, but as the unchangeable and faithful One for His elect whose deliverance He commanded. Faith sees in God the God of full salvation. Thus it gives free access to a totally miserable sinner to seek his salvation only in Him and to expect it only from Him.

For "He is a rewarder of them that diligently seek Him." This seeking is the fruit of God's drawing. The Lord utterly excludes all merit, saying, "I am found of them that sought me not." Not because of our seeking does God allow Himself to be found, but only out of free grace, as faith acknowledges.

Still, the Lord leads His people in the way of continually seeking Him. No matter how much comes against it, he that is drawn by God does not stop seeking. As the Canaanitish woman, they lay hold of God upon His Word, saying, "Truth, Lord" (she was willing to admit she was but a little dog), "yet the dogs eat of the crumbs which fall from the master's table." Thus the soul comes to God in deep humiliation, since outside of Him there is nothing but death. In his seeking, the soul desires a Surety for his sin and for cleansing from all iniquities. The soul goes out to Christ to receive of Him the fulfillment of all needs, and, indeed, to please God by keeping His commandments. For true seeking makes us turn from sin and mortifies our members which are upon the earth. There is nothing that can make us hate and flee from sin more than a true, lively, persevering seeking of God and His favor. The Lord joins "following after righteousness" to "seeking the Lord" in Isaiah 51: "Hearken to Me, ye that follow after righteousness, ye that seek the Lord." Thus Abel sought to please God when he brought a bloody sacrifice carefully chosen out of his flock; and also Enoch when he walked with God in obedience. And God will reward this seeking.

Did your soul ever long for God? Did you ever have to lose all the grounds of your religion? Could you be content with your baptism, your confession, your zeal for the church and the truth? Have you not fallen in Adam? Can you please God with your historical faith? Will God have pleasure in your outward religion? Oh, before God shuts the door forever, may all your grounds fall away, and may it be given you to come to God in Christ as a hell-worthy sinner. Verily the Lord shall not cast you out.

What a comfort for the upright! Let the law judge you; let your sins testify against you. Confess your unworthiness above all others. But the Lord shall reward you not according to your merits, for then it would be a lost case, but He gives a reward of grace, and that is an exceeding great reward. Be of good courage, people of God, and be glad; your heart shall live that seek God. God shall cause such seekers to find. Seek the Lord Himself. May He be your portion. Learn to look away from your own works. Do not spend your money for that which is not bread. Let Christ be your possession so that you may find rest for your soul in God alone. May the Lord remove from you unbelief and distrust, which so often keep you in bondage, by deep impressions of who He is, a God of grace and salvation. In all our wants and needs may there continually be

a seeking of God, a seeking to be well-pleasing unto Him. Oh, that the world would charm us less, that sin would be subdued more, and that faith may produce fruit to "draw near to God," for that only is good. God shall one day reward His seeking people in eternal glory, when they shall find Him eternally, where there shall be no more separation, and where faith shall no longer be necessary, for it shall be changed to sight. It is for this time-state, but also sufficient to satisfy our souls, that the Apostle teaches us the necessity of faith: "For he that cometh to God, must believe that He is, and is a rewarder of them that diligently seek Him." "But without faith it is impossible to please Him."

CHAPTER VIII

Noah

"By faith Noah, being warned of God of things not seen as yet, moved with fear, prepared an ark to the saving of his house; by the which he condemned the world, and became heir of the righteousness which is by faith."

—Hebrews 11:7

How dreadful is the result of sin! Fallen man revealed more and more that he had become a slave of sin, running faster and faster toward perdition, the result of sin, both because of the justice of God and also because of the nature of sin itself. The destruction of the first world shows us in a lively manner how terrible sin is, and may open our eyes to the fearful danger of our frivolous, morality-destroying times. Flee, oh, do flee iniquity! Governments and nations, countries and churches, young and old, whoever you may be, turn away from the slippery path of committing horrible sins before your downward fall is so rapid that it cannot be stopped.

May the times of Noah be a warning for us! Sensual lusts reigned at that time even as they prevail today. The beauty of women had a stronger influence upon fallen man than the seriousness of preaching. No less than three hundred years Enoch had walked with God in the midst of his generation. By word and deed this preacher of righteousness had spoken against sin; with sharpness he had proclaimed the coming judgment. But nothing was effective. Would people listen to that God from whom they had turned away, and whose words they had rejected as lies? Had they not accepted Satan's words, "Thou shalt not die," and ignored God's threatening as if it were a lie? When in a state of unbelief, man lacks what is necessary to properly understand God's Word, he casts away every yoke. Rejection of all admonitions is to be expected when conscience is silenced in the way of sin. Iniquity breaks through more and more. Neither the serious preaching of Enoch, nor the warnings of Noah, shall stem the approaching destruction. Sin is no more sin, as we also hear in our days. Without any sense of shame they cry, "Sin and virtue have changed places." What formerly was virtue is now wrong, and what before

was sin is now virtue. Troelstra, a member of Parliament, once asked, "What is sin?" People do not understand what sin is because they do not know God. There is a sad parallelism between the days of Noah and our days in this regard.

Women were in the foreground. The sons of God saw the daughters of men. "It came to pass, when men began to multiply on the face of the earth, and daughters were born unto them, that the sons of God saw the daughters of men that they were fair; and they took them wives of all which they chose" (Gen. 6:1,2). Those sons of God were the children of Seth; the daughters of men were from Cain's family. Some have described the angels as the sons of God. But how can this be? Angels do not marry. Angels have no gender. Based upon God's Word, how can anyone teach that there is intermarriage between angels and men?

The sons of God mentioned here were Sethites, who were mentioned in this way to show the contrast between the church and the world. In Scripture we find these terms used more often in this sense. The church of the Old Covenant is called "children of the Lord" (Deut. 14:1; Hos. 1:10) and the people of the world are called "children of men." In this coming together we are shown the evil of the church intermarrying with the world. That was the destruction of the family of Seth. The fear of God disappeared; wickedness increased; the righteous died out; no one filled the empty places. Soon there was only one family left that still regarded God and His Word, namely, the family of Noah. Outside of Noah's family, no one recognized God and people mocked at his rebuking and threatening words. This was the situation in the days of Noah.

And today? Certainly the Lord keeps His Church on earth. He maintains it in the midst of most fearful persecutions, and also keeps it during the most dreadful temptations to sin. But has Jacob not become small in number? We hear of very few true conversions. Where do you see the places of those whom God has taken up into glory filled by others? Are there not congregations that formerly were mentioned because of the large number of those who feared God, but now there are scarcely any of God's children to be found?

And the visible Church? Does not Satan strike a blow there? Does not the world draw many of our rising generation away every year? Have not football games and theaters gained more attraction for many than the church? And in the world do not women with their ornaments and dress draw many to destruction? And what do the dance halls, which are visited by many, tell us? The evil of immorality cannot be controlled. Nations are being destroyed because the family is being destroyed. Many think they can enjoy sensual lusts to the full without being punished.

Who listens to the reproofs of God's Word? Where is the fear for threatened judgments? Shall there be another deluge as in the days of Noah? No, the covenant with Noah tells us and the rainbow confirms it: the world shall no more be destroyed by water. Nevertheless, God's wrath shall be revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men. Red, black and grisled horses rode and are riding throughout all the world; war, death, and all kinds of judgments come from heaven, also in our days. But who bows under them? Do men forsake their sins? On the contrary, there is increased hardening, running faster and faster down the slippery road to perdition. To very many the dreadful words of Paul are applicable: "God gave them over to a reprobate mind, to do those things which are not convenient; being filled with all unrighteousness, fornication, wickedness, covetousness, maliciousness; full of envy, murder, debate, deceit, malignity." Soon God shall also say to this world, "My Spirit shall not always strive with man" (Gen. 6:3).

As long as God strives, there is hope. But woe be to us if He gives us over to ourselves! A deluge may not come, but other judgments can cause us to grieve because of the distress of sin. Moreover, an eternal judgment awaits us. One day fire shall set the world aflame. One day we shall stand before the judgment seat of that Man by whom God shall judge the world.

Poor world! Sad service of sin! Oh, that we may be given our life for a prey! Forsake the foolish and live, and go in the way of understanding.

Noah was born in a very dark time, but of him there is expectation. His father Lamech, when he was one hundred eighty-two years old, said, "This same shall comfort us concerning our work and toil of our hands, because of the ground which the Lord has cursed." The name *Noah* means comfort or rest. The godly Lamech* had eyes to see the sad misery of his days. His soul was bowed down under the burden; God's striving was felt; the earth bore the curse and there was grief over the work of their hands. There shall be comfort when sin is broken. Even in the way of God's judgments the church of God shall be comforted and obtain rest. By naming his son *Noah*, Lamech showed unmistakable faith, by acknowledging God's justice and bowing under the guilt of sin. You can understand it only if sin is a greater grief to you than its misery. Thus it becomes to God's people by the uncovering work of the Holy Spirit, otherwise never. But if so, then certainly in a way that our soul bows down in the dust and embraces the justice of God. In a personal relationship to this unimpeachable justice of God, children of God have learned to ascribe righteousness unto the Lord,

* Of the wicked Lamech we read in Cain's genealogy in Genesis 4:18, etc.

even if He should condemn them. But that basic teaching bears fruit, also in the further circumstances of their lives. No, flesh and blood are not submissive, and so God's children also experience times of bitter rebellion against the Lord in days of oppression. But as soon as there is a bowing under God, when the living man does not complain about the punishment of his sins, as Jeremiah says, but about sin itself, then there is comfort even in the judgments of God, even in the most terrible judgments because God's glory shines forth against sin in those judgments. The daughters of Judah rejoiced in the Lord's judgments. Lamech could call his son Noah even though the days were dark and the sins were piled high, and he was expecting God's judgments.

The days of distress which lie behind us, the times of the terrible World War II, have caused a hope to arise among God's people, and a joy because the Lord proved that He was God, even though flesh trembled because of judgment. God does not permit Himself to be mocked. Is it agreeing with God in His judgment to say amen to His dealings, even when flesh and blood are not spared? Is that not something of what one day shall perfectly be the portion of God's elect when there shall be no more fleshly ties, and when, in the final judgment, they shall eternally agree with the justice of God and shall judge the world?

May God grant us to taste that comfort, which is so different from the sweetness with which so many flatter themselves today. Oh, to taste that comfort, people of God, that is founded upon the justice of God! May that give us strength and courage to testify against sin. May it revive the church in these dark days, and give courage to battle the abominations that are openly committed so that something may be left of the salting salt that it lose not its savor.

The fear of God was finally preserved in only one family; it was in the family of Noah. He, the son of Lamech, is the third person of whom the Holy Scriptures testify that he was righteous. Paul shows him to us in the power of faith; by that faith Noah prepared the ark when there was still nothing visible of the threatened judgments.

God warned Noah. The written word containing the revelation of God to salvation was still far in the future. God revealed Himself then in various ways. He Himself spoke to Noah warning him of things not seen as yet, namely, concerning the coming judgments. When the Lord was on the way to destroy Sodom and Gomorrah, He said, "Shall I hide from Abraham that thing which I do?" Well then, neither did God hide from Noah the approaching destruction of the world; and no less so because Noah had a calling to fulfill for the saving of his house, and the condemnation of the world. God warned Noah; the Lord bound upon his heart the seriousness of

the times and commanded him to build an ark. And Noah believed this word. The world mocked; they did not believe the judgment was approaching. They ate and drank and were merry; they married and were given in marriage. What could harm them? Even the preaching of Noah did no good. The world became ripe for judgment.

Take notice of this. When the serious warnings that God sends us do not humble us or cause us to forsake sin, we become ripe for judgment. What a sad picture in our present time! The nations are hardening themselves against the most terrible judgments and are immersing themselves in sin. They have no ear for God's Word. Who still believes? Even the doctrine of eternal damnation must be removed. The Church of England took the word "hell" out of its confession, since it was just an old word to make people afraid. We fear no hell; we hope for no heaven; we serve sin freely, as in the days of Noah, and we have done away with God and His Word. What sad days! An awful judgment is developing.

But Noah found grace in the eyes of the Lord! That is what made this preacher of righteousness to differ; it was grace, and grace alone. By this the line of demarcation is drawn between the people of God and the world. We are all dead in sins and trespasses. But God draws His people out of that state of death; He saves His people from the destruction to which they, too, had subjected themselves; He delivers them by grace alone, in distinction from those whom He makes to possess their iniquities in eternal woe. Nothing that is in them entitles them to this distinction, nothing! It is only because "Noah found grace in the eyes of the Lord." Oh, God's people should continually acknowledge with amazement that it is only free grace that saves them, free grace continually flowing from the fountain of God's eternal mercy. That grace grants all that is necessary for time and eternity, and is a defense for all that is glorious. Thus Noah was saved from the judgment of the deluge, he of whom Genesis 6:9 says, "Noah was a just man and perfect in his generations, and Noah walked with God."

Even before God warned him about the coming judgment, Noah was a partaker of the grace of God and had communion with Christ and His righteousness by faith. What Scripture teaches us from the beginning, and time and again preaches loudly, is this: The most important act of faith is the justification of the sinner before God. Our Catechism also says that the profit of faith is our justification. I am now not speaking of justification itself, but I do want to show that the people of God are cut off from their own life by the justice of God in order that they, as subject to condemnation and united to Christ by faith, may find grounds in the eternally valid sacrifice of Christ, upon which God the Father acquits them of guilt and punishment and gives them a right to eternal life. This

benefit is as perfect an acquittal as if we ourselves had satisfied God's justice, yes, as if we had never known or committed any sin. It is ascribed to Noah by the Holy Spirit. And in these dark days may it awaken many souls who are resting on their experiences without having found Christ as Surety for their debt. Oh, that God may strive with us for the glorification of His violated justice, so that we shall not rest until we are reconciled with God in Christ by faith.

A second granted benefit is mentioned regarding Noah. He was a just man and perfect in his generations, and he walked with God. A holy walk goes hand in hand with justification. No, that is not a legalistic doctrine. Paul, to mention only one text, rejects with all that is in him any looseness of life. After he has defended the doctrine of free grace in the justification of the sinner before God, he opposes the Antinomians with the question, "Shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound?" That is what some would like: To continue in sin and rest upon grace once received; they make Christ to be the scapegoat. He is often used for that. But what does God Himself say, speaking through Paul? "God forbid. How shall we, that are dead to sin, live any longer therein?" Where will we end if this doctrine of Scripture is rejected? What a sad darkness often covers God's people because of looseness in their lives; sin deprives them of their boldness in approaching to God; it makes a separation between the Lord and their souls. Oh, how we should hate sin more and flee from it! Together with justification freely given we should seek sanctification, drawing strength out of Christ by faith.

Then we would enjoy the privilege of Enoch and Noah more often; they walked with God. There is nothing better. "But it is good for me to draw near to God." This admonition is the more urgent because the days are evil. The Lord calls to His own, "Watch and pray, lest ye enter into temptation." May He bind that word also upon our hearts. We would also be better prepared for judgments and adversities which God sends. God still does not hide from His people what He is doing, but we are so estranged from communion with Him that there is no room in our souls for the revelation of God, nor is there the exercise of faith to understand it. Of Noah, however, the Holy Spirit testifies that by faith he prepared the ark, being warned of God of things not yet seen.

Neither the waters upon the earth, nor the ark of safety were seen when God spoke to Noah. Also how unlikely the word of God was for man, namely, "The end of all flesh is come before Me. And, behold, I, even I, do bring a flood of waters upon the earth, to destroy all flesh, wherein is the breath of life, from under heaven; and every thing that is in the earth shall die."

How impossible! A flood over the whole earth! Where would the water come from? How strange the ark was in which only Noah and his family would be saved, with so many animals!

But Noah believed the Word of God! That which was not seen he accepted by faith because he relied upon God's perfections which would avenge sin and save by grace. The judgment that was announced stirred up great fear in Noah's soul, causing him, by faith, to rise up to and accept his deliverance, justifying God's dealings and obeying God's commandment to build the ark.

Thus Scripture shows us faith in exercise when it causes the soul to arise out of the depth of the righteous judgment of God. It is the nature of faith to seek and embrace salvation in Christ, and that so perfectly that even what is not seen is immovably firm for him who believes. Thus Noah was filled with reverential fear before God because of the justice of God, and moved by that fear, he built the ark by faith. Again, faith always exercises itself in accepting God's unimpeachable justice by subjecting itself to the judgment that is threatened, so that salvation may be received in the way ordained by God. Faith arises from the depths and has a humbling effect. Alas, to many this is strange. They reason about faith, a great faith, but they are so lifted up that they are far above the true people of God. With a coolness which is on the verge of indifference they often speak frivolously about being set at liberty. Also they speak indifferently about justification and about the new life, which is painful to anyone who still has some impression of the Most High and respect for His work. The reason for this levity lies in the fact that many have a self-accepted faith, and were never in fear before God. They do not arise from the depths because they never were there. They do not know true contrition as God's people do. They are strangers to the true life of faith, notwithstanding their many words.

In Noah, however, we are shown that, in true faith and moved with fear, he prepared the ark. He firmly believed things not seen as yet because God spoke them. Faith relies unconditionally upon God's Word.

Here, in Noah's act of faith we are shown that faith embraces those actions which are done in agreement with God's perfections. This is true both in the salvation of the righteous as well as in the condemnation of the wicked. The first world was destroyed because of sin by a judgment in which God's holiness, righteousness and omnipotence were glorified in a unique manner. The world was allowed to mock at the preparation of the ark, and to smile condescendingly about building an ark upon the dry ground. The time of grace God still gave them they spent in an even greater outpouring of sin, their wickedness ripening them for the threatened judgment.

These things are written for our admonition. May God bind it upon our hearts; may He especially open the eyes of our rising generation. The world mocks more than ever. They are too wise in their own eyes to listen to the admonishing voice of God. Con-

science is smothered by willfully and wantonly committing sin. Even the judgments that God sends do not humble us. May the Lord save us from the snares which the exalted language of the world lays before us. Do not be ashamed to profess the Word of God. Our children must pass through the world. Every day our young men in high school or at college, at the workbench or on scaffolding, in the office or in the factory, are exposed to all kinds of temptations, and hear dreadful blasphemy. Also our girls are daily involved with those who sharply criticize all that pertains to the church and to the truth, and who exaggerate the allurements of this life in the world.

Who still believes in a judgment? What wrong is there in doing what everyone else does? Who can live with the narrow-minded ideas of twenty years ago? Be care-free and enjoy the good things that life offers. That is the God-despising language of the worldling. If I must warn you against any one thing, young people, let it be against such alluring language. Show freely that you have been taught differently; that God's Word teaches otherwise. Never be ashamed to call upon the Name of the Lord. Do not vacillate. Do not even go half-way with the world, for then you will be reproached for it, and your desire to do the right thing may be inhibited. Remember that all of Noah's family in the ark were saved from judgment, also Ham, who later had to bear the curse for his mockery. No, I do not say that if you forsake the world, you will have enough with which to appear before God, but you will never regret it. You may be spared from many judgments, and you may experience that to him who ordereth his conversation aright God will show His salvation. Flee youthful lusts. Let the Word of God have power over us and our families to restrain us from iniquity.

It is without question that God will come with His judgments, even though few believe it. Who listened to the preaching of Noah? Who believed there would be a flood, even when the ark was being prepared? Who understood anything of all the warnings proclaimed in holy seriousness? With the urgency of impending judgments, year after year the invitation to be saved was proclaimed. But everything remained as it was—for one hundred twenty years. And still, God brought His judgment; His Word did not fail; His longsuffering came to an end; the world perished! And then, when it was too late. . . , but then the time of grace had ended.

No other deluge shall come! The Lord has promised and given us the rainbow as a pledge. But shall not God's justice burn against sin? Shall the Lord remain silent about abominations? Notice the bitter complaints that are uttered day by day. Count them if you can; but no, they cannot be counted; sorrows are multiplied. Where does the world go now with all its pleasures? Friends drop away in

discouragement. In frightfully increasing numbers suicide, which leads to eternal perdition, becomes the refuge for some of those who forget God. Poor world! Turn unto God. But how many have become afraid of the approaching judgment? Who is seeking to escape? The righteous, certainly, shall escape; they shall be given their life for a prey. But then I have an admonition: Separate yourselves from the world! Forsake your wicked life. Remember the warnings you were given and the prayers that are lying for you before the throne; see in the eyes of father and mother the tears which were wept for your welfare; do not forget the words spoken by the lips of the dying. Flee for your life's sake; yes, flee to the ark of safety.

The ark of Noah refers to Christ. By faith we must hide in Him. This is sealed to us in baptism. But the sign and seal of baptism does not in itself bring about fellowship with Christ. We must be born again. We cannot be content with less. No matter who we are, we must be brought into the ark. And now many dance about the ark, full of amazement, and sometimes under impressions; however, they do not enter. Or, in other words, many are in the visible church, but do not truly partake of Christ. Ham was in the ark; Lot's wife went out of Sodom; Orpah went with Naomi; and so many go along with God's people, associating with them under the Word. They have impressions and weep warm tears, but they miss the main thing: they are not partakers of Christ! Let false Christendom freely follow the style of these days, resting on their baptism and confession, but do not allow yourself to be mistaken. We are traveling to eternity. We have to meet God in His justice. Are you at ease? Every day brings us closer to the great Judgment, but do you consider it? Is your nice personality a ground upon which you can rest? Do you not need a Surety? Must not an ark be built for you? Has the Son of God then suffered in vain? Do you know a way of salvation outside of Christ? Oh, that God will take away the mistaken ground from under our feet, and open our eyes to His burning justice. Then it may be possible to enter the ark of safety and obtain a true union with Christ by faith, so that our souls can be saved from the judgment which shall surely come.

I do not say this to deal harshly with concerned people. I know there are those who cannot determine their part in Christ, and they fear they shall perish, but they shall surely be saved. I know what the struggle of their soul is, what their hopes and their fears are, and, what is more important, God knows it! That is why they totally agree with the necessity of being hid in Christ. They cannot be happy with less. More and more it is revealed to them that all the things on which they hoped before can be no ground to stand upon before the judgment of the Lord. One thing is necessary for them, namely, that they enter the ark. So often they could cast an

eye upon Christ, and see in Him all they need for salvation. When, oh, when shall He say, "I am thy salvation?" But can He forsake His own work? Hoping souls, will you not by faith depend upon His Word? Noah preached one hundred twenty years; he built the ark although there was no water to be seen; he waited by faith for what was not seen. Will you then not wait upon Him, who is faithful, who cannot lie? Let the mocker vex you; let unbelief cry out, "Who shall live when God doeth this?" The Lord will come in His own time. Though He tarry, wait for Him, because He shall surely come; He will not tarry.

Condemn the world, people of God. That is what Noah did. Condemn it by your conversation and your walk; let something of the work of faith shine in you as in Noah. He pleaded for God's righteousness and testified against sin. Noah could not do otherwise, for God had persuaded him of His justice. That was the root of Noah's actions. He agreed with the justice of God; he subscribed to the contention with which God contended; he subscribed to the sentence which God pronounced upon the world. Moreover, Noah condemned the whole world by that faith which sought salvation in Christ. It was that faith which made the condemnation of the world heavier. The Lord Jesus once testified, "The men of Nineveh shall rise up in the judgment with this generation and shall condemn it: for they repented at the preaching of Jonah." But shall Noah's life then not condemn the first world? They had no excuse any more. Through Noah God warned them, with longsuffering, for one hundred twenty years. The first world did not go to its destruction unwarned.

So may God vouchsafe His people in these evil times to condemn the world by a circumspect life, in the exercise of faith. Proclaim the justice of the Lord, people of God, that justice that has become dear to you, and in which your salvation is founded! Proclaim it in the midst of judgments, that the Lord may be sanctified. Deliver your soul from the wicked, whether they hear or whether they do not. We are silent too much. But why? Because we lack the exercise of faith. We know very well that to testify against the world we need more than experiences of years past. Faith planted in us must be exercised. And that exercise is missing so often. Hence the darkness which can cover our souls, and the lack of liberty which besets us. May God grant us liberty, and cause us to speak out against the abominations that are committed in His sight.

The fruit became evident. Noah became heir of the righteousness which is by faith. There is no better inheritance than this. It is not a righteousness according to the works of the law. Law and grace are mutually exclusive. By the deeds of the law no flesh shall be justified before God. The justification of sinners is by faith for

the sake of the merits of Christ. It was of this righteousness that Noah became an heir. It came to him through the death and resurrection of Christ "who was delivered for our offenses, and was raised again for our justification." Long before, the righteousness of faith had been granted to Noah, but when the Apostle here teaches us that he inherited it when he had prepared the ark, God the Holy Spirit indicates that by this act of faith Noah was *assured* of this righteousness. Thus also Abraham was justified by the sacrifice of Isaac. Special strength of faith caused Noah and later Abraham to break through, so that they not only subjected themselves to the justice of God, but out of the sentence of death, expected and embraced life and deliverance, yes, were assured of them.

May that inheritance become our portion, just as those people who are granted that privilege to lose their own life and salvation in the righteousness of God to find it in Christ. May the fruit of faith in exercise strengthen and confirm us continually, and cause us to bear fruit in making ourselves loose from the world to the glory of the grace of God. We could then condemn the world, surrender that to which our heart so often is attached—and yet it is only for a time. Oh, may God's people stand firm in the riches of the hope of salvation that is laid away for them, and may those who fear the Lord stir up those to jealousy who know nothing but the swines' husks of worldly pleasures! May God attain His honor through His work in us and through the exercise of true faith, which embraces as beyond all doubt what God has said, even if it is not seen. May our souls awaken from sleep and Zion shake itself from the dust, in order to walk in the beautiful garments of justifying faith as heirs of God, to the honor of His thrice-holy Name.

CHAPTER IX

Abraham

"By faith Abraham, when he was called to go out into a place which he should after receive for an inheritance, obeyed; and he went out, not knowing whither he went."

—Hebrews 11:8

From the period before the deluge the Apostle gathered those witnesses whose life and death clearly proved that faith is the substance of things hoped for, and the evidence of things not seen. Abel, Enoch and Noah pleased God by faith, and were righteous before God in that righteousness for which Paul counted all things but loss and dung, so that he might be found in Christ, not having his own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, namely, the righteousness which is of God by faith. Walking by faith, they experienced God's favor, and, in spite of all opposition, difficulty, and enmity, they could continue to walk in God's ways. By that faith they surrendered to the Lord and embraced His Word.

By that same faith the Hebrews gave up everything to which they were attached because of their natural relationship to Abraham. They had to renounce the temple and the priestly ministry to embrace Christ by faith alone as the only Savior. They had to surrender the old privileges of Israel for the much more glorious ministry of the New Covenant, in which the middle wall of partition was broken down. In that difficult exercise, the example in the lives of the fathers before the deluge could strengthen them.

Truly, it is a difficult thing for us to lose all grounds outside of Christ, to give up everything for Him alone. That is not only an impossibility by nature, but in God's children it is very difficult to come where we may say:

*I have lost all,
Have made Jesus my choice,
And now am His entirely.*

How much faith must be strengthened, and by divine power how much the bands that keep us bound to Moses and his service must be broken! Oh, that the examples explained by Paul may

teach us to rest in nothing but the fellowship of faith with Him who was delivered for the offenses of His people and was raised again for their justification.

The second group of witnesses the Apostle draws from the time of Noah until the giving of the law at Mount Sinai. In this period the Epistle to the Hebrews mentions six: Abraham, Sarah, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, and Moses. Under the law the number of the heroes of faith shall increase. In whatever dispensation it was, faith remained the same. There was but one way to please God, namely, through Christ. By faith God's church has conquered, however great the agony was. Surely, despising all the weak and sandy foundations upon which many build in our days, this may be the security of God's people: that whatever opposes them, faith shall conquer. The way of salvation, the character of faith, and the warfare of the church remain the same, even if the dispensation of grace changes for God's people. For this reason there is not only agreement with those old witnesses, but in their lives there is also such a rich fountain of comfort for the militant church. Whoever we may be, in whatever circumstances we may be, however impossible the warfare is that we must wage, if by true faith there is a true union with Christ in our hearts, we shall be more than conquerors in Him.

Do you want further proof? By faith Abraham was obedient when God called him to go out to the place he would receive for an inheritance; and he went out, not knowing whither he went.

Abraham was an inhabitant of Ur of the Chaldees. This was a very famous city, probably having grown out of a place of worship. Their princes claimed the title of "king." A temple had been built for the moon god, Sin, that was about three hundred twenty-eight feet long and about two hundred ten feet wide. It had several floors and strong pillars. Ur was a rich city, and yet poor. The service of the one true God was strange to them. Idolatry even entered the home of Terah, and darkened the remaining impressions of the creation, the deluge, and the tower of Babel. The lie of idolatry replaced the worshiping of the living God; the lust of the flesh took the place of the fear of God. Also in Abraham's days, Ur offered that which pleased the flesh, a life of sinful pleasures, although then its glory was already waning.

Out of this life, so full of attractions for the flesh, God called Abraham. He would never have exchanged rich Ur for an unknown region; he would never have bidden farewell to all the pleasures, nor exposed himself to so many dangers as were connected with following God's command; certainly Abraham could not have taken leave of friends and kinsmen, relatives and acquaintances . . . if God had not called him. The only reason for Abraham's departure from Ur was that God called him. And that calling took place with

irresistible power; it inclined his heart and caused Abraham to surrender unconditionally to God by faith.

Those who live under the Word of God receive the gospel call unto salvation. To each of them comes the Word, "Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred." "Look unto Me, saith the Lord, for I am God and there is none else." God beseeches you through His ambassadors, "Be ye reconciled to God!" Permit us to observe that the Lord is standing at the door of our hearts and knocks for us to open to Him; neglecting the call of God shall one day increase our condemnation. The calling of God places a responsibility upon us, and it shall eternally burn within us if God's Word does not lead us to repentance.

In the face of this awesome responsibility and the hardening of our hearts under the Word, it is also unchangeably true that the enmity of our hearts is so great that we neither can, nor will, nor shall bow before God unless *He* prevails over us and conquers. No one, no, not one person, shall be able to excuse himself before the judgment seat of God, and certainly not any who lived under the light of the Gospel. But neither shall one follow the call of God's Word unless the call resounds in him with divine power, "Get thee out of thy country and from thy kindred." God wrought faith in Abraham to follow him; God granted Abraham the renewing of his will and the inclination of his mind, so that he went without gainsaying. It was God's work that caused Abraham to walk by faith. Abraham's faith rested on the call of God and caused him to walk according to the law of God.

Now then, with such an irresistible power God calls His people out of their Ur of the Chaldees. Not only does His Word come to them, but by the ministration of the Holy Spirit the Word comes with such a persuasion that they can no longer resist. The Lord strikes through their heart. Oh, what a power! They came to church feeling so dead! So estranged from God! The Word, directed to them so often, never bore any fruit. But then, that morning, that place, that hour—it can never be forgotten. Then God came and spoke to their souls, and laid claim to them and drew them out of sin and the world. Then the glory of the Ur of this world faded, and they went away as a lost sinner. It was impossible to remain any longer in sin; impossible to live longer in the way of self-righteousness. God won over their hearts, and implanted faith, which broke through everything—through all trouble and conflict. It caused them to leave lover and friend, even father and mother, yes, whatever they might have been involved with in their daily lives, even though they might have to beg for their bread. The attractions of grace were infinitely stronger than all the objectives of this life. Although flesh cannot understand it, the promises of God are worth more than the whole world. Then they can understand

something of why Abraham left Ur to go to a strange country that God had promised him.

And still the calling of Abraham involved more than his personal salvation. God called Abraham to make a covenant with him and his seed. In Abraham another dispensation would be prepared for the church of God. He was the first person after the flood of whom it was said that he pleased God. He was to be the forefather of the Hebrews, the father of all the faithful. Because Abraham crossed the Euphrates, the Jews were called Hebrews. The name so beloved by them refers to the calling by which they were separated in Abraham unto the Lord to be His possession. Therefore Abraham had to leave not only his country, but also his kindred. God wanted Abraham to be alone, to make him a great nation. His father died in Haran; and also Lot, who was a just man and went with him to the land of promise, would be separated from him. But in Abraham the covenant would be established so that a poor sinner could inherit blessings in Christ. "In thee shall all the families of the earth be blessed" was the word of the Lord God.

Blessed with blessings in Christ. By faith Abraham saw and appropriated those blessings. To limit Abraham's faith only for the promised land is to belittle it. Faith denies the worth of worldly inclinations; it embraces Christ in the promises. The fulness of the only Savior caused Abraham to depart and to scorn the whole world. Oh, examine yourself, whether it was in the strength of Christ that you forsook many sinful ways, and whether He became precious and attractive above all things to you. Whatever happens outside of true union with Christ by faith has no real value. As Abraham departed from Ur because by faith he saw salvation alone in Christ who is the substance of the promise—so Christ draws all His children. He manifests Himself in them, and faith reveals Him as the only way of salvation. This causes desire, hunger, and thirst for Christ, when faith rejects all else for His sake. Oh, that we may not detain our souls with trivial matters, but might be exercised more to see Christ in the promise, and receive overpowering strength from Him to forsake everything outside of Him. How the church would shake itself from the dust and put on its beautiful garments!

CHAPTER X

Abraham Going to Canaan

"By faith Abraham, when he was called to go out into a place which he should after receive for an inheritance, obeyed; and he went out, not knowing whither he went."

—Hebrews 11:8

By faith, Abraham was obedient to the voice of God and departed from Ur of the Chaldees. By faith, God's people are enabled to forsake the world and all that it contains. Abraham did not leave Ur just to wander over the earth; God called him from his native land and from his kindred to go to a land which He would show him. Abraham's moving out of Ur was toward a definite destination, in the way of God, to the land He had prepared for him.

Thus the efficacious calling of God causes all His people not only to forsake what is earthly, but also to come to the rest prepared in Christ. Some emphasis should be placed upon the last clause of the text. It is what distinguishes the true work of God from all that is only pretense. Many are convinced in their consciences, causing them to be somewhat aware of their condition. They seek to change, and sometimes do make great changes in their lives. They forsake taverns and places of amusement. They become more serious in their religious life. Sometimes they choose the company of the children of God. But they do not truly come to Christ. Perhaps they return to their previous habits. They become slack and their impressions lessen, yet they cling to their former convictions, trusting in them as if they provided grounds for eternity.

How many rest on the strength of their impressions without ever having lost their sinful foundations! Truly, well might their souls tremble, for there is great danger that they shall one day be turned away with those awful words, "I have never known you." Should there not be an urgent need in their hearts to find a Surety for their debts, so that God's justice might be satisfied, and they, as lost sinners, be reconciled to God? Is this not what troubles God's children mostly, that they are still estranged so much from Christ? The avenger of blood drives them on until they enter the city of refuge. Abraham was called out of Ur of the Chaldees to inherit the land which God would show him. May it be an encouragement for

these restless people to know that the Lord Himself will lead them safely onward, guiding them in the chosen way, where fools cannot tread.

Abraham received Canaan as his future possession. His seed would inherit the land for an everlasting possession. The Lord promised His called servant the entire land, from north to south. But although the possession was complete in the promise, in actual possession the father of the faithful had no more than a burying place which he bought of the children of Heth. According to God's free disposal, Abraham's right was founded in the promise of God which he received and appropriated by faith. And yet the time had to be ripe to take this inheritance away from the heathen; the present inhabitants must first fulfill the measure of their iniquities. Then God would, in righteous judgment for their sins, take away their heritage and give it to Abraham's seed for a possession.

Let us remember that we are only stewards of all that we possess here on earth. God is the sovereign possessor, and everyone is responsible to Him. He shall call us to give account whether we have received ten talents or whether we have received only one. If we realized the responsibility resting upon us, we would manage our affairs with more fear, and would cleave less to the world. The sad dissatisfaction and terrible murmurings of our hearts would be greatly diminished if we would consider that God is the sovereign possessor who gives to whom He will, and as he will. Ownership of wealth will never be equally distributed. God has made both poor and rich, and it shall remain that way. Socialism shall never be attained. Peace and contentment are great blessings and they far surpass the pleasure of abundance of money and goods. And that contentment can be our portion when, finding the legal ground of our possession in the gift of God, we humbly acknowledge Him as sovereign.

God's people are heirs of a new heaven and a new earth, but with them it is often as with Abraham: here on earth their possession is but small. God has not chosen many rich people, and not many nobles. Nevertheless, God's promise, embraced by faith, makes them possessors of the eternal inheritance reserved in heaven for them.

Come, people of God, let it not grieve you too much when the Lord does not give you much more here on earth than a place to bury your dead. May faith cause you to accept this small token as a pledge of the eternal inheritance which the Lord has promised you in His Word. In all difficulties may your soul be content with the *future* reward, so firmly embraced by faith. Or, is the inheritance that God has promised strange to you? Abraham saw the land which was prepared for his seed. Were you ever given an insight into eternal glory? Was it ever as if heaven was opened for

you, and your soul drawn above the earth? God's people shall not enter a strange heaven, and no strange hymn of salvation shall be sung there. They receive the first-fruits of the eternal inheritance here by faith. And if the first-fruits are so inexpressibly sweet, what shall the full harvest be! Let the world have its own. It has nothing more than what is here below. But lift up your hearts, rest on the promises of God, and by faith, expect the heritage of the saints.

But to attain this, the same total surrender is necessary that characterized Abraham when he left Ur. God demands His people's complete surrender, that they may yield themselves more unto Him and entrust themselves to Him. He is willing to care for them, soul and body. Is God's promise not sufficient to encourage us as we experience adversities in this life? Are not the assertions of His love sufficient to relieve all our sorrows? Soon we shall have finished our course, and we shall be with Him forever! Come, people of God, lift up your heads. Do not complain so bitterly about temporal adversities, but have faith that God is the strength of your heart and your portion forever.

Abraham went by faith. He went out, not knowing whither he went. That characterizes the surrender of the heart. Abraham followed unconditionally. He surrendered himself entirely to God's guidance and grace. It was enough for him that the Lord would show him the land. In Abraham we see the one thing that is necessary, namely to follow God's command unhesitatingly. Our nature objects, but also the old nature in God's children may protest. We continually need to have the grounds upon which we rest taken away, so that we may resign ourselves completely. We are inclined to want something in our hands first; we want to see and touch something before we put all our trust in God and His Word. Our inclinations and desires strive against the exercise of faith. It is faith which causes us to cast ourselves upon the Lord unconditionally and follow Him wherever He may lead us. The strength of Abraham's faith lay in following without knowing whither he was going. Oh, that we may receive a little of what has been shown us. Then we will travel safely upon the most unsafe ways.

*God will lead him safely onward,
Guide him in the chosen way.
Then at ease his soul shall rest,
In Jehovah still confiding;
E'en his children shall be blest,
Safely in the land abiding.*

CHAPTER XI

Abraham in Canaan

"By faith he sojourned in the land of promise, as in a strange country, dwelling in tabernacles with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise."

—Hebrews 11:9

Faith in the promises of God strengthened Abraham to follow the Lord to an unknown land. Unconditionally, without any stipulation, the father of the faithful left Ur of the Chaldees. Even when this entailed separation between him and Lot, to whom he was bound not only with ties of blood, but also with spiritual ties, Abraham was silent. For faith, no adversities were unconquerable. Abraham bore all the difficulties connected with God's way; he was, not in his own strength, but by faith, a sojourner in the land of promise as in a strange country.

Although God had promised him the whole land, Abraham dwelt there as a stranger. He did not receive the rights of a native inhabitant; he who was called of God was not numbered among the heirs of Canaan. As a stranger he went up and down and to and fro. In the fenced cities of the heathen there was no room for him, since he was not permitted to become a citizen of those communities. Had God not called him to live alone? Thus Abraham was a stranger and a sojourner. The only thing Abraham obtained in Canaan was a cave for a burying place to bury his dear wife. He did not build a house nor did he own any land, and although he made a league with some of the princes, such as Mamre, Aner, and Eshcol (Gen. 14:13), Abraham remained a stranger in Canaan just as his posterity dwelt as strangers in Egypt. Thus Abraham had to live very circumspectly so that he might preserve the place God had shown him, for his life as a stranger exposed him to many dangers.

The inhabitants of the land of promise were heathens estranged from God. That is related to us repeatedly. We read in Genesis 12:6, "And Abraham passed through the land unto the place of Sichem, unto the plain of Moreh. And the Canaanite was then in the land." Again, Genesis 13:7 tells us, "And the Canaanite and the Perizzite dwelled then in the land." Especially in the latter place you sense the danger described for you in those heathen

inhabitants, for there is mentioned the strife between the herdsmen of Lot and those of Abraham. That strife must have grieved Abraham very much, and he must have considered it a real danger in that land. What burdened him even more and increased the danger was that "the Canaanite and the Perizzite dwelled then in the land." Therefore we read emphatically that Abraham had fear, not only of Pharaoh in Egypt, but also of Abimelech, so that also in Gerar he said that Sarah was his sister, which was so much more troublesome because he had experienced the sad result of such deception in Egypt. But Abraham feared for his life. The brief descriptions in Scripture about the inhabitants of Canaan are enough to make us realize in how many dangers Abraham found himself continually, being in a strange land.

During his pilgrimage Abraham was strengthened by his faith. The line of demarcation was drawn between the world and himself as one who was called by God. In all trials and dangers, Abraham, by faith, could depend upon God time and time again, trusting in His power and all-sufficiency. The root of Abraham's life of faith lay in his union with Christ who was revealed and ascribed to him in the promise. The object of Abraham's faith was not temporal matters, but the promised seed, in whom all nations should be blessed. It would be contrary to the nature of faith to say that Abraham trusted in the Lord only for his temporal life. Certainly, there are people who seek deliverance from temporal needs with God, and who can speak of many wonderful deliverances, but whose souls never entered the ark of safety by faith. I remember hearing in my youth about a woman who often put her God-fearing husband to shame when he was worried about temporal needs. Her confidence that the Lord would give deliverance was great, and often was not disappointed. But I have seldom heard of a sadder death than the death of that woman. In frightful agonies of hell, she cried out that she would perish forever, for she knew nothing but temporal deliverances. Oh, may we learn that true faith is rooted in Christ as Savior! Out of that root temporal blessings flow, but then only as fruits. Thus it was with Abraham. Faith in the promise of God, of which Christ is the substance, caused him to leave Ur, caused him to live as a stranger in Canaan, and vouchsafed him to continually find all his strength in God in all the dangers of life, for Abraham was a favorite of God.

Thus Abraham dwelt in tabernacles, that is, in tents. The tabernacle in the wilderness was given to Israel as a tent that could be carried; in Canaan it was exchanged for a temple. It was not uncommon in those days to live in tents. Whole nations dwelt in tents and moved from place to place with their herds. The women had their own tents, as we see in the story of Rebekah, and of the wives of Jacob. Thus Abraham also dwelt in tabernacles in

Canaan. He had no well-founded, established dwelling place, but fastened the cords of his tent into the ground with stakes, to move it repeatedly in the land of his pilgrimage.

Thus he lived in Canaan with Isaac and Jacob. Abraham lived about sixteen years after the birth of Jacob. In this respect we can say that Abraham dwelt in tabernacles with Jacob. However, the Apostle is referring more to Isaac and Jacob living with the same privileges as Abraham. They also lived as strangers in that land, and in tabernacles. Jacob was the last one before the fulfillment of God's promise to His Israel. His seed lived in Egypt four hundred years. But Jacob himself shared in Abraham's situation, and both he and Isaac were heirs of the same promise which God had given to Abraham and his seed; and which He had renewed to them. For thus the Lord spoke to Isaac in Genesis 26:24: "I am the God of Abraham thy father: fear not, for I am with thee, and will bless thee, and multiply thy seed for my servant Abraham's sake." And likewise God made Jacob to inherit the same promise when He spoke to him personally, "I am the Lord God of Abraham thy father, and the God of Isaac: the land whereon thou liest, to thee will I give it, and to thy seed." (Gen. 28:13). By personal appropriation Isaac and Jacob became heirs of the same promise. The saving promise becomes ours only through personal application by faith.

In whatever wants and circumstances Abraham was, by faith he sojourned in the land of promise, as in a strange country, nevertheless believing that this country was his possession and that of his seed according to God's appointment. His faith was not dead, but was exercised in a continuous surrender to God's will and good pleasure. What a long time Abraham awaited, by faith, the promise of God concerning his seed! And what an unusual power of faith he revealed in the sacrifice of the seed given him, believing that God was able to raise Isaac up, even from the dead. Thus the faith in Abraham grew and was strengthened, giving God the glory.

That same faith God still works in the hearts of His elect. His grace draws them out of the world, and causes them to live here as strangers in the midst of worldlings. Their life is hid with Christ in God, and in all their needs the Lord will be their refuge and strength. Has this also become your life?

Truly, we must learn something of this experience if it shall be well with us. Focus your heart upon it. Many cannot hide their disdain and hatred of the experiential life of God's people. In word and in print truly "pious people" are mocked. These persons think they know better. They accept Jesus, and speak of each other as being saved. But, alas, if you ask them about the basis for their hope; if you insist upon an experiential knowledge about an inward experience of misery in order to come as a lost sinner to Christ, they know nothing of it. They can agree with Rome which offers to

sell heaven for a quarter. They feel that they share the same root of faith, but they sense themselves to be so widely separated from the people of God who speak of their experiences, that they cannot conceal their bitter animosity. All this should open your eyes the more for the great danger lying in the superficial doctrines of our days. "Gather yourselves together, yea, gather together, O nation not desired; before the decree bring forth; before the day pass as the chaff." What shall it be when your day of grace shall have passed and your judgment shall be irrevocably decided! Oh, all of you who have never become lost in yourselves, may God open your eyes! Forsake the world and its entertainment. Young men and young women, hear the call of the Word of the Lord. It is no dishonor to you, and it means nothing if you do not know how a theater or a dance hall looks. But to lack Christ shall be eternally disastrous for you. Old and young, whoever you may be, learn to redeem your time of grace. May your life become a new life; may God make you a stranger on earth and cause you, by faith, to find in Christ alone what is necessary for your salvation.

God's people do not feel at home in this world. But, alas, God's people still live too much in what is of the world. They must often complain, "My soul cleaveth unto the dust."

But it does not take away the fact that when the Lord called His own from death to life, He wrought another principle of life in them, a principle which is from above, and which can never be a part of the world. Their circle of friends, both the wicked and the religious, become strangers to them, and they are rebuffed by them; therefore, new ties are laid and true friendships made with the children of God.

May the Lord grant that we may continue to hold to that position. Do not let the gap that was made by God be closed by fleshly lusts and by association with those who are strangers of spiritual life and of the truth. Nothing can be more harmful to your soul. God's people shall dwell alone, although they must pass through the world. It is better to experience the enmity of those who are estranged from God than to have the love of the world. For God shall be the refuge of those who fear Him. Has He not been a constant strength in all your needs? Did He not take your side when the enemy treated you most bitterly? Do not God's people travel safely in the hands of the Lord of lords?

People of the Lord, seek much to be united with Christ by faith. That union is more than temporal blessing. May your soul rest in that union. What bold access you will find in Christ who ever lives to make intercession for His people! Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need. Whatever need may oppress you, He was tempted in all things *first* that He might become your helper. Soon

He will relieve you of your sojourn and cause you to leave the land of your pilgrimage and enter into the house of His Father, where He has gone to prepare a place for you. May His grace be upon His people, so that they may walk in His ways and His Name be glorified thereby, in spite of Satan and all his hellish cohorts.

CHAPTER XII

Abraham Looks for the Heavenly City

"For he looked for a city which hath foundations, whose Builder and Maker is God."

—Hebrews 11:10

The city Abraham looked for was the heavenly city. Grotius and others distorted this text, minimized Abraham's expectation, and thereby attacked the ministry of Christ under the Old Covenant. Notwithstanding Grotius' great gifts and an outstanding treasure of knowledge, his enmity against sovereign grace robbed the truth of its internal strength. Here too we can see that the natural man, despite his education, does not understand the things of the Lord. The natural enmity of his heart hinders him from seeking true salvation that is given to God's people out of pure grace. His natural blindness causes him to despise heaven and to seek his happiness only in the world. The alienation resulting from this inability to understand the life of God's children is very evident when they teach that Abraham looked only for the earthly Jerusalem, that is, that one day his seed would dwell there. What a poor explanation! Is that all Abraham was seeking?

Such an explanation is entirely contrary to what the Apostle declares in Hebrews 11:16,17, namely, that the believing fathers were not mindful of that country from whence they came, but they desired a better country, that is an heavenly. God was not ashamed to be called their God, for He had prepared for them a city. No, Abraham's expectation was not limited to the earthly Jerusalem; he sought the heavenly city. Moreover, the solemn declaration that God is the Builder and Maker of that city is not applicable to the earthly Jerusalem. It is true, the glory of Jerusalem is often exalted in the Word of God when speaking of the spiritual significance of that city, because God had His dwelling there. Essentially speaking, faith points to communion with God in Christ which shall be perfect in heaven. God built for His people a city in heaven; and by faith Abraham looked for that city.

Faith's expectation was based upon the promises of God to

Abraham. The content of those promises was not of a temporal nature. It was rather the promise that God would be the God of Abraham. Would the Father of the faithful then have expected only earthly blessings? That would be contrary to the nature of faith; it would nullify God's covenant and promise; it would attack the blessedness of God's people, and only show what is in man, who is of the earth earthy.

We need no further proof that in this text the Apostle ascribes to Abraham's faith the expectation of eternal glory. That is according to the covenant and the promise of God, and is in harmony with the nature of faith which God works in the hearts of the elect. We wish to consider the text in that sense.

The city whose Builder and Maker is God is the eternal dwelling which God has prepared for all His elect, and into which they shall enter after death. It is the Father's house in which are many mansions, as the Lord Jesus said to His disciples; there He Himself has gone to prepare a place for His people.

The Apostle speaks of this city in 2 Corinthians 5:1, saying, "For we know that if our earthly house of this tabernacle were dissolved, we have a building of God, an house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens." Yes, there, above the cloudy, starry sky, where the Lord has His throne; there, where the perfect glory of the only and Triune Covenant God's glory shines forever, without any hindrances or obscurity; there, where the perfect angels serve God and minister to Him and honor their Maker forever; there, where there is no sin, no imperfection, no trouble or grief; there on high is the city God has prepared for His people. That city embraces the full glory of heaven. In that city God's people shall live eternally.

The hope which Abraham had upon this city and the faith he had in it strengthened him to dwell as a stranger in a strange land. It was emphatically stated, "*For* he looked for a city." That expectation explains the strength of Abraham's life. In that expectation he could endure everything that came upon him here below. No sorrow could counterbalance the salvation he expected. Truly, a little of the happiness God's children enjoy here exceeds all that they can find on earth, and causes them to scorn all enmity, difficulty, and suffering, yes, even death. This life in the world that has become strange to them is only temporary. The oppression shall not last forever; their pilgrimage will soon come to an end. Would the sufferings of the present time be worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed? No, definitely not! God's people shall surmount it all. Oh, that our hearts were more encouraged in the expectation of the heavenly city! How our soul often cleaves to the dust! What low esteem God's children can sometimes have for glory! How is it possible that at times it seems

as if we are busy only with the world? But then the way we must go seems so difficult. Shake thyself from the dust. Put on thy beautiful garments, O Zion! There is a better expectation for you. Your day of salvation is dawning!

This city is well-founded; it has foundations which shall not deteriorate. In Canaan Abraham lived in tents that were easily moved, for they did not have a foundation, but were only fastened with stakes in the earth. The life of each of us is a life in tabernacles; we have here no continuing city. Everything in this world lacks that durable foundation upon which the city of eternal salvation is built.

That city is founded in the unchangeable counsel of the Lord God. He says Himself, "My counsel shall stand, and I will do all My pleasure." In that eternal counsel of God the salvation of God's people finds its immovable foundation. Let the whole world be moved, let all that is temporary be shaken, let Satan rage, let the world contend, nevertheless, the foundation of God stands sure, having this seal, the Lord knoweth them that are His. Oh, how solid is the ground upon which the city of salvation rests! The foundation lies outside the reach of Satan and his hellish powers. He can attack the souls of God's elect, he can distress them and cause them to tremble, but he shall not touch the foundation of their salvation with one finger. That foundation lies in God. Shall God's children then not hope?

If they had to contribute anything (by grace they learn to understand this more and more) their case would be lost forever. But no, the foundation is laid in the sovereign will of God. Nothing of man has value. "It is not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of God that showeth mercy." God's people are not saved because they will it, but because God willed it. What can make this city tremble? Its foundation is immovable. Who can resist God's will?

*But safe Thy people Thou didst keep,
Almighty Shepherd of Thy sheep.*

The foundation of this city is laid in the covenant of grace which was made with the Son in eternity, and which God in time makes with all His elect. As Hellenbroek says, they humbly, faithfully, and uprightly consent to the covenant with God, assenting to the demands as well as the promises of the covenant. Our Fathers spoke of the covenant of grace from eternity and of the covenant of grace in time. Read the precious work of Boston on the covenant of grace, to which Comrie prefaced an introduction on the covenant of works. How sad it is that many in our days rob the covenant of grace of its grace, and externalize it! Oh, tell me! What is a covenant of grace without grace for poor sinners? What kind of covenant would that be?

Behold, in the covenant that God made with Christ as Head of all His elect, lies the firm foundation of salvation. The city is founded upon the substitutionary work of Him who had engaged His heart to approach unto God. "Ask of Me," said the Father, "and I shall give Thee the heathen for Thine inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for Thy possession." Oh, how firm is the foundation of the heavenly city! The gates of hell shall not prevail against the church of God. Never fear, people of God!

It is very important that a building has a firm foundation. If the foundation is good, the building can withstand much. But here the "building" is also the work of God. God not only laid the foundation, but He was also the Builder and Maker of the city. The building of this city is not entrusted to another. God is the beginning and the end. He completes what He begins. He executes His eternal counsel Himself.

We can see the fulfillment of the promises in Christ in that completed building or city. He testifies to us that He was dead and is alive forevermore and has the keys of hell and of death. Neither death nor hell can harm God's elect, nor prevent the completion of this city. Christ lives at the right hand of His Father so that one day His people shall also be where He is. Salvation is accomplished perfectly in Christ. There is no other name under heaven, given among men, whereby we must be saved. In Him the city is complete. God's eternal wisdom, love, grace, and justice are glorified in Christ. The sinner is reconciled with God *by* God. You see, the Builder and Maker *is* God. That city shall inspire the eternal admiration of all those thousands, the innumerable people who shall enter to perfectly honor and praise Him that sitteth upon the throne, and the Lamb who purchased them with His blood.

This city has been built and is inhabited. It shall be the dwelling place of all God's elect. Not one more shall enter, and not one shall be left behind. God Himself builds it. He draws His people out of their dead state; He redeems them out of grievous misery; He prepares them by His Spirit. The living stones are hewn here below; in heaven no blows of a hammer will be heard. Soon, when God's counsel has been served, those bought with Christ's blood shall enter the city of God with their glorified bodies, there to enjoy God's undisturbed favor and communion. Did Abraham not have expectations for that city? In faith he knew himself to be an inhabitant and God's promises directed him there. How his soul yearned to inherit that city!

Has God also prepared that city for you? It is not for all men. It is not for those who walk in their own strength. It is only for those people who by grace may learn to know themselves to be strangers on the earth because by faith they have found a foundation in Christ. Oh, my fellow traveler to eternity, you who still live on in

your own wicked ways, consider your own lifestyle and your end! For you also there is a city prepared, but it is the city of eternal perdition where the wrath of God burns as a fire that shall never be quenched; where Satan shall be with all his condemned angels; where all the wicked shall gnaw their tongues for pain and shall blaspheme God day and night. There shall your portion be if you die as you were born. May the Lord be merciful to you before your time of grace comes to an end.

May God's dear people live more in the expectation of this celestial city. How many are fettered with unbelief and doubt, and, therefore, how great the need that we seek rest alone in Christ. Oh, how is the gold become dim, and how God's people wander about outside of the blessed fellowship with God! Esteem the world less. May the Spirit of God mortify sin in us more and more so that our souls may live above the dust, and that we may run the course which the Lord has set before us, encouraged and strengthened.

Soon your course shall be ended, and you shall enter the city that has foundations, and which will stand forever. Here on earth all cities shall fall, but this city shall stand forever. "We shall ever be with the Lord." Then all that is sin and iniquity shall be done away; then no sorrow shall ever fill your heart; no darkness shall cover you. Come then, soon we shall enter the city whose streets are of gold, where there is no need for the sun, neither for the moon to shine in it, for the glory of the Lord lightens it, and the Lamb is the light thereof. They shall enter it whose names are written in the Lamb's book of life. It is a city which has foundations, whose Builder and Maker is God.

CHAPTER XIII

Sarah's Faith

"Through faith also Sara herself received strength to conceive seed, and was delivered of a child when she was past age, because she judged Him faithful who had promised."

—Hebrews 11:11

Did Sarah receive strength through faith? How could the Apostle write that? Does Scripture not tell us of Sarah's unbelief?

God had promised Abraham that not the Ishmaelite, but "he that shall come forth out of thine own bowels" shall be thine heir. In that unforgettable night God led Abraham outdoors and told him to look at the stars, and said, "Tell the stars, if thou be able to number them. So shall thy seed be." Then Abraham believed. God confirmed the promise to him by entering into the covenant.

But Sarah? She bare him no children. Did she then wait upon the salvation of the Lord? Upon that God who doeth wonders?

Read Genesis 16, "She had an handmaid, an Egyptian, whose name was Hagar. And Sarai said unto Abram, Behold now, the Lord hath restrained me from bearing: I pray thee, go in unto my maid." Was it by faith that Sarai gave Hagar to Abram? Did not the bitter fruit show otherwise? The Lord had definitely stipulated Sarai in the promise to Abraham. Her name had even been changed from Sarai to Sarah. And when the three men, who were on their way to destroy Sodom, entered Abraham's tent, the Angel of the Lord mentioned the time of the birth of the son of promise: "I will certainly return unto thee, according to the time of life and Sarah thy wife shall have a son."

Did Sarah, in whose name God had revealed Himself and bound Himself to her, then believe? Sarah laughed within herself, saying, "After I am waxed old shall I have pleasure, my Lord being old also?" It is not so clear that Sarah received strength by faith to conceive seed.

Or does the Epistle to the Hebrews actually refer to the faith of Abraham? Does the Apostle mean that Abraham's faith worked strength in Sarah? Some have tried to explain the words in Hebrews 11 in that sense, but we do not believe that to be so.

The Holy Spirit here testifies of Sarah's own faith. How clear is the transition in these words from Abraham to his wife: "Sarah herself received strength to conceive." Moreover, Sarah was the free woman, out of whom the church is (Gal. 4:22,23). The believing women were her daughters (1 Peter 3:6) to whom her faith and conduct were used as examples. This text does not speak of Abraham's faith, but of that of Sarah. If we deny this, we do not set aside the objections against Sarah's faith, but rather minimize the work of grace in Sarah and deny her faith which is repeatedly praised in Scripture.

Thus the question remains as to how Sarah showed her faith, a question that is more urgent because Sarah is the first woman whose faith is praised in Scripture, even by two apostles, Paul and Peter.

Of Sarah's early life we know nothing. Scripture does not mention anything about her as a young woman. She appears as the wife of Abraham, and as such Peter uses her as an example for other women. She was obedient to her husband Abraham, calling him lord. She conducts herself according to God's institution and is submissive to God's command in Paradise which subjected the will of the woman to the man. This was not difficult for Sarah, as it is for so many in our days who think of it as an impossible situation and make a mockery of it. Sarah was fully satisfied with God's institution; it was her life to be obedient to her husband to whom God had bound Himself with His unchangeable Word. Therefore she can go with him to Canaan, leaving her relatives and friends in Ur of the Chaldees. For Sarah also believed God's promise and hoped upon His salvation. Although kings took her, first Pharoah and later Abimelech, she remained faithful to Abraham. At the word of Abraham she hastened to prepare three measures of meal and bake cakes for Abraham's guests, and thus she entertained angels unawares.

Tell me, does not such conduct bespeak the life of God in her? Was not Sarah's faith revealed in her walk? But what about the appalling events just mentioned? Would you then make light of the testimony of the Holy Spirit regarding Sarah? Or does the word of the Apostle fail to give light here about her conduct? Sarah believed what God had spoken to Abraham, that he would have a son; but she had no light regarding the wonderful way in which God would give a solution to this problem. She could not see herself involved in the fulfillment of this promise. Then she gave Hagar to Abraham, thinking, "It may be that I may obtain children by her." Yes, Sarah erred. She had not come to a complete and firm assurance. But was there not, deep in her heart, faith in the promise of God regarding the coming of the Messiah? What Sarah did was very wrong. But did she not do so because by faith there was a

longing in her soul for the salvation God had promised to Abraham? Certainly Sarah was no unbeliever!

And when she laughed? Then unbelief was raising its head. She was looking at the circumstances; to her it was an impossibility that the son of promise should be born out of her. She was sure that her womb was dead. She thought of Hagar's child as the fulfillment of the Lord's promise to Abraham. Do not support Sarah's mistrust, or her denial of what had taken place. We must never, no, never support sin. But we can understand this mistrust without detracting from Paul's testimony that by faith Sarah received strength to conceive seed, yes, received strength to conceive! She became the mother of Isaac, the mother of the son of promise, by faith.

In Christ is neither male nor female. Does this not confirm Sarah's life of faith? The woman was first in transgression, but grace raised her up as well as the man. Sarah is mentioned among the heroes of faith; Rahab follows. Is the door of grace closed for anyone? No, not for any. In Christ, God offers salvation to those who are totally lost, whoever they may be. "Hearken, O daughter, and consider, and incline thine ear; forget also thine own people, and thy father's house; so shall the king greatly desire thy beauty."

May the Lord stir us up to jealousy for that life which the world knows nothing of. Do not allow vain companions or fashions of these days to interest you. Forsake the world and all that it stands for. Whoever we are, may the Lord make us followers of Sarah, and grant us to partake of her faith.

A life of faith is a life full of strife. In our days you meet multitudes of so-called believers who know nothing of any activity or experience of the soul, nor do they know of the conflicts in the life of believers. It is to be feared that they have nothing but an imagined faith which they shall find to fall too short. None need doubt Sarah's faith, for God the Holy Ghost testifies to us that she believed, and also to how much strife her faith was subjected until finally she was enabled to break through, and then she received strength to obtain the fulfillment of the promise.

Should not God's struggling people then take courage? When God convinced you of the state of your misery, He wrought within you that true saving faith by which you could turn to Him with supplication and weeping, pleading for grace. The Lord then strengthened that faith by the opening of His Word, by preaching, and in the meditations of your soul. Then He opened to you the way of salvation in Christ when you no longer knew the way. He spoke to you of His promises upon which you might depend. At times you could cry out that you would never doubt again. But oh, those conflicts! Those assaults which whisper that this work is not of God, that the guilt of your sin is too great, that for this sin or that

sin there is no escape. You feel it is different for you than with God's people, or that redemption in Christ is for the elect and you will be left outside. Oh, what distress you experience when the fulfillment of the promise becomes impossible, as with Sarah! All these assaults must be conquered by faith. Come, God's dear ones, keep courage. The Lord is your refuge. He never forsakes the work of His hands. Would you be willing to trade with those so-called believers who accept in their own strength? Certainly not; you do not desire to build upon sandy ground. Has the Lord not shown in Sarah that He can and will strengthen weak faith so that doubt is expelled? Have not you yourself experienced it as faith was applied to your soul? Did not then all doubt flee away? May the full light break through in your soul one day, when reproof shall not vex your heart any more.

Both Paul and Peter speak of Sarah, and we find nothing mentioned but the exaltation of God's free grace glorified in her. So the Lord will also do unto you. He shall crown His own work! Faith shall also strengthen your soul. Then the speechless Zachariases will speak, and the dead wombs in the Sarahs shall live. Then your lips shall speak of the glory of God.

It was grace in Sarah. She received strength. The basis of her happiness and glory lay not in her, but in God. Out of Him she received strength, by which her life, deteriorating with age, was renewed and rejuvenated. By faith the promise of God attained its fulfillment. And will God's people not glory with Sarah, who by faith receive life, complete redemption, and salvation in Christ? What remains for your soul to glory in? Did not God remove all support from under your feet? Did one sigh, one plea remain, when the Lord cut off your life? Your naked soul was clothed with the righteousness of Christ; you were robed with the garments of salvation. It was God's work in you that by faith you could embrace. You have received strength. God's people shall rejoice in gifts received. Oh, may it humble us continually before the Lord, so that we do not glory in the heights as though we did not receive it. The more established people do much harm when they exalt themselves because of their gifts of grace. They harm themselves, since they draw darkness over their souls, for God gives grace to the poor. They also hurt many upright souls by placing themselves far above them. Grace makes us humble and growth in grace is characterized by a deep humiliation of heart.

How powerfully faith worked in Sarah! She judged Him faithful who had promised. Thus faith directs itself to God and His promises—to Him who is not a man that He should lie. Oh, the firmness of faith! That resting upon the Unchangeable One! Shall not His truth stand forever?

Hoping upon God's promises, whether for your temporal needs,

for His church, for your children, for your eternal redemption, or for whatever your needs may be before the Lord, let there continually be a reliance upon the Lord. In all difficulties and human impossibilities, judge Him faithful whose Name is Jehovah, "I AM THAT I AM."

CHAPTER XIV

“Even of One”

“Therefore sprang there even of one, and him as good as dead, so many as the stars of the sky in multitude, and as the sand which is by the sea shore innumerable.”

—Hebrews 11:12

Faith is neither empty nor unfruitful. As a fruit of faithfully embracing the promise of God, Abraham received seed that was innumerable. Many people seem to find satisfaction that, in the midst of many and distressing difficulties, some word or text comes to their minds, but their souls seem to feel no need for the *fruit* in the fulfillment of the promises. Should we then not question very much whether the Lord has spoken to us? God causes us by faith to plead upon the promise, and that faith bears fruit and receives the reward of grace. That which God speaks to His people is suitable for their needs, and awakens in them a strong desire for the promised good which God will give in His own time.

The Lord had promised Abraham that not Ishmael, the son of the bondwoman, but “he that shall come forth out of thine own bowels shall be thine heir.” “And He brought him forth abroad, and said, Look now toward heaven, and tell the stars, if thou be able to number them: and He said unto him, So shall thy seed be.” It would be innumerable, as the dust of the earth (Gen. 13:16) and as the sand which is upon the seashore (Gen. 22:17).

However impossible the fulfillment of the promise was for man, God granted Abraham faith to accept His Word. Indeed, Abraham’s faith was so strengthened that it penetrated to the very root of the promise, namely, Christ. Abraham could rest upon Him and build his hope upon His righteousness alone. Therefore we read that Abraham believed in the Lord; and He counted it to him for righteousness (Gen. 15:6).

Certainly this was something more than blindly resting on one word or another that comes to our mind. Satan can also come with the Word, and he goes about as an angel of light to terrify many souls. The promises of God, however, cause His people to come to the righteousness in Christ, to find rest there. It is always the character of faith to go out to Christ, to hunger and thirst after His righteous-

ness, and, as a benefit of faith, the soul is justified before God.

Oh, how damaging it is to picture experiential life as nothing but vaguely experiencing or feeling something, as though faith is not a clear and distinct knowledge of God in Christ. Our feelings cannot be our grounds. That was enough to mislead Isaac in blessing his sons. We see, in Abraham's life, the exercise of true faith which justifies the soul. Whatever may change in this world, the character and nature of faith does not change. This proves that God works faith in His people and strengthens it so that, to unite the soul to Christ, faith embraces, and is exercised with, the promises of God. Remove Christ out of the promise, and then what remains? Remove Christ out of Abraham's faith, and it is destroyed. But if your soul has no need of Christ, then cast away all your experiences; they are only misleading you. Coming forth out of a conscience distressed by sin, they lack the stamp of being the work of God. Faith brings the soul to Christ, embraces Him in the promise, and has a justifying power. That characteristic of uniting the sinner to Christ is so strong, that even when the promise concerns temporal matters, faith looks to Christ. God promised Abraham a seed, and by faith he embraced Christ as the root. Therefore sprang there even of one, of him as good as dead, so many as the stars of the sky in multitude.

Yes, Abraham had a natural seed: an Isaac, a Jacob, soon a family of seventy souls. At the time of the exodus from Egypt, there were about two million souls unto whom the oracles of God were committed. Also in this respect the promise given to Abraham is of great significance. John Owen remarks in his notable commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews, "When it pleases the Lord to cause His Church to grow in numbers, it is for various reasons a cause of rejoicing for all believers, and the subject of their daily prayers as something that was often promised in the Word of truth." In our sad God-forgetting days, may it please the Lord to raise up His Church again, especially in our fatherland where the Lord has done so many great wonders in past ages. Thousands have turned away from the church. Football fields and theaters have become their places of worship. The pleasures of sin have become their delight. They have despised God's Word, and run faster and faster down the steep incline of sin. How desirable it would be if the Word of God would be received with more power, and we would be brought back to the Lord. Verily, our nation would prosper, and we would not increase our damnation so dreadfully as do those who drink iniquity like water.

Oh, that especially our rising generation would turn to the church and to the truth of God! Then the enemy would be robbed of his strength. As John Owen says, "a godless, carnal multitude consulting together about temporal concerns for their profit, and

ending in superstition and sin, call themselves the church, as does Rome, established by the subtlety of Satan, to rob the truth of its power and to decrease the glory of its promise." But whoever it may be, whether Rome or revolution, the enemy of God and His Word would lose its strength if the Church of God would spread its power and truth over the consciences of thousands. I can greatly rejoice in the fact that in many places it is to be observed that there is an interest in the truth among the younger generation. May the Lord build up His Church again. May He bring the dry bones together to make them men again, and that He may withhold not His Spirit so that there may be living men. Abraham's seed is innumerable because it is the generation chosen by God, the spiritual seed which shall one day be a multitude that no man can number. David laid violent hands on the work of God's sovereignty when he numbered the people. Therefore, the Lord was greatly angered by this deed, for it was to be an innumerable seed brought forth by His miracles. Let hell rage, God brings His people where He wants them. This seed sprang forth from Abraham when he was as good as dead for he was about a hundred years of age. But his age did not deter God. He makes the dead to live. Jehovah had hewn His people out of the rock and digged them out of the hole of the pit. God does wonders in begetting a spiritual seed; wonders in Christ, who died and is alive, and in whom God is reconciled with the sinner. God also works wonders in the hearts of His people. It is incomprehensible for our understanding how the Lord worked in Abraham so that out of him, he being as good as dead, an innumerable seed was begotten. What God does is wonderful for all His people. The strength of faith by which Abraham embraced the promise of God was also wonderful. No, all this did not take place outside of the father of the faithful. His soul lived in it, enjoyed the fruit of it, and partook of the joy of God's work.

There is a generation that does not recognize these experiential mysteries. They speak against them and dare to imply that many of God's servants came to a miserable end—they who laid down their lives for the truth, and by experiential faith attained rest in Christ. Some also mock at how God works in His people, and this includes many of Reformed persuasion. Poor fools! With an imagined heaven they go to perdition, misleading themselves and others. How could we ever attain joy in Christ without faith? By that faith God becomes wonderful in His people, so wonderful that even of one, and him as good as dead, seed came forth as the stars of the sky in multitude and as the sand on the seashore innumerable.

Innumerable is the seed of Abraham. Innumerable shall you be, people of God! Here it is often a small number; here it is but a little flock, not respected in the eyes of the world; and still one day

it shall be a multitude as numerous as the grains of sand on the seashore. How the church of God shall shine in glory, as an army with banners! Whatever may come against it, God will protect His Church, and shall gather His elect. Let hell rage, neither oppression nor distress shall hinder the promise of God nor take away the fruit of faith. Neither the bondage in Egypt, nor the graves in the wilderness, can prevent the propagation of the Church. Take courage, children of God; God takes care of His own so that no hoof shall be left behind. He shall not forsake the people of His heritage.

They shall be innumerable, and sparkle in eternal glory. Here the glory is concealed. Here the treasure is carried in earthen vessels. But one day, oh, people of God, what shall it be, when all that is in part shall be done away! There shall be no more oppression, no more distress, and what is more, sin shall cleave to us no more. As the stars in multitude so shall we be eternally in glory.

May the Lord strengthen our faith in His Word and promise, and cause us, if indeed we are partakers of Him, to walk in that hope. The foundation of God standeth sure, having this seal, the Lord knoweth them that are His. "Therefore sprang there of one, and him as good as dead, so many as the stars of the sky in multitude, and as the sand which is by the seashore innumerable."

CHAPTER XV

Died in Faith

"These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off, and were persuaded of them, and embraced them, and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth."

—Hebrews 11:13

"These all," says Paul.

These all, namely, those who died. Hence this connotation does not extend to all the believers mentioned in the chapter. Enoch did not die, but was translated into glory. The apostle has especially in mind all those, who having been warned of God to do so, left their fatherland and tarried as strangers in Canaan. Those indicated here, in the first place, are Abraham and Sarah, Isaac and Jacob. This is also clearly shown in the verses 14 and 15, where Paul says that they declared plainly that they were seeking another country, and that they were not mindful of that country from whence they came. Anyone can see that Scripture here refers to Abraham and Sarah who left Ur of the Chaldees, and to Isaac and Jacob who lived as strangers in Canaan, and did not return, but walked in the footsteps of Abraham.

And are not all those included whom God drew out of the world, all those whom He purchased with His blood because they were given Him by the Father; all those whom the Holy Spirit called from death to life; all they who, with Abraham, obtained like precious faith—the true faith by which they received strength out of weakness during this life, and which in death did not forsake them. *These all died in faith.*

Paul had already mentioned the life of faith; now he points to their death. No, death is not separate from life. In this life, the decision must come. How emphatically the writer of this epistle indicates this in another place where he calls dying "gain" because for him to live was Christ. God is perfectly sovereign. Where grace is bestowed it is freely bestowed. Some laborers were hired at the eleventh hour to work in the vineyard. The thief was exercised in his soul when he was already hanging on the cross, just a few hours before his death. Could not God snatch us out of the claws of Satan,

even on our death bed? Wherever our pathway may lead us, the foundation of God stands sure; the Lord knoweth them who are His. But woe to the man who fritters away his time; woe to him who flatters himself with a false hope of a deathbed conversion; woe to them whose life is without Christ. Their death shall be an eternal loss. Oh, that we would learn to use our time of grace to our profit. I have known some who walked in the way of sin until they were sixty years old or older and then by God they were brought before His presence. But I wish that everyone could understand something of sorrow for their sins and how they have persisted in opposing God for so long a time. Certainly they would not live on so recklessly, but would understand that life and death are inseparably connected.

Grace to die cannot be separated from faith in life. In faith they have died.

Come, then, all ye great ones of the earth; come, lovers of sin; come, self-righteous people; come, you that rest upon your baptism and your confession; come with me to the deathbed of those who have lived by faith. All of you will stand alone, and that . . . before death! You all shall lack the Surety who alone can cover you with His righteousness. Your conscience shall gnaw; your embellished faith shall faint. The hope of the hypocrite shall perish. Death with all its terrors shall take hold of you. Oh, do listen! Let a holy jealousy of the privilege of God's people seize you. They died in faith.

What then did they believe? They believed that after death comes eternity. Mock then, atheists! Just say: "No one ever came back." No, of those who have already gnashed their teeth in perdition, not one has been granted the privilege to return, just as the rich man was not permitted to do so. If you live on indifferently as if no eternity is coming, at death your eyes will be opened when it is too late. Then God will laugh at your calamity and mock when your fear comes. But God's people are given to believe that an eternal well or an eternal woe will follow. God bound that upon their hearts when He called unto them, "It is appointed unto man once to die and after death the judgment." Oh, how they feel the mockery of the wicked. Those taunters who can distress them so much truly dwell in their own hearts. but never can it be taken away from them what the Lord once impressed upon their souls, the firm conviction of an eternity. Fear caused them to flee until Sinai's thunder passed over them. But they are also drunken with gladness and heavenly joy when the Lord reveals for their eye of faith the eternal glory awaiting them. They saw the city whose Builder and Maker is God. They have heard the jubilation of the redeemed before the throne of God; they beheld the glory of God and of the Lamb.

How could they have died in faith if these matters were strange to them? Shall they then meet an unknown God? Shall they enter a strange heaven? Certainly not! Their faith reaches to the resur-

rection day, the day that also their mortal bodies shall put on immortality. If their bodies are buried or burned, if their bodies are given as a prey to the wild beasts or to the waters of the sea, it shall detract nothing from the resurrection that shall perfect the salvation of all those who die in faith. They shall live eternally, for God is their God. And He is not the God of the dead, but of the living.

But still, in order to die in faith, to cheerfully enter death as a conqueror, it is necessary to receive the grace of God to be loosed from all that is below. God's people are not always loose from this life. Earthly ties also bind *them*. Sometimes people are heard to speak so lightly about death. But is not death itself a king of terrors? May God cause us to look beyond death, to fix our faith upon Christ who has swallowed up death in victory. Is it not necessary that we are given a lively exercise of faith and a concurring with God's counsel which will determine our end? Do not God's children need grace to die? Dying in faith includes all this. It indicates perseverance of faith as well as the exercise of faith, by which once the world was abandoned, and by which one day farewell shall be bidden to all that is here below to inherit a better land. Would our hearts not desire that faith? Let the enemy attack you, let death stare you in the face, true faith shall remain firm even in death. In this lay the strength of those who could cheerfully bid farewell to father and mother, husband or wife, children and relatives, yes, to all that is here below, and enter glory singing, "I have waited for Thy salvation, O Lord." Or did you never hear of such dying? Certainly, you have! Such a death is no death. These all died in faith.

And yet those of whom Paul speaks had not received the promises. How can this be when verse 17 emphasizes that Abraham had received the promises. Are these testimonies contradictory? Certainly not. But by the promise mentioned here you must understand the promised blessing. God gave the *promise* to the patriarchs, not the fulfillment. The promise, the supreme promise—is it the promise of the land of Canaan, as Grotius believes? How is it possible that such a learned man did not have a better understanding of the Word of God? But it is hidden from the wise and prudent. The promise is none other than that of the coming of Christ in the flesh. That "*coming*" Abraham saw from afar (John 8:56) and rejoiced in it. What are all the promises in which so many people glory, which they say they have received, sometimes ten at a time or half a chapter at a time, if Christ is missing in them? He is the contents of the promise. All temporal and spiritual blessings are in Him. He who has Christ, has all. You will have to cast away all your experiences and texts if the promise of Christ has not been made your portion. He reveals Himself to His saints in the promise. He removes the veil that makes God's Word so dark for us so that He may shine in His own people for His glory. One promise, the supreme

one of Christ, causes them to hope and expect. Oh, faith looks so far!

They have seen it afar off. The life of faith upon the promises causes them to see and appropriate to themselves what is contained in the promises. That was the case with the patriarchs of whom Paul speaks. They embraced Christ, although He had not yet come in the flesh. Thus it often pleases the Lord to lead His people through the promises in Christ, which are not immediately fulfilled. The life of faith is a longing life, yearning and reaching out for that which we desire. Here in a desiring to embrace Christ; there in a hoping for the salvation He has promised. And now it is by the exercise of faith that the soul finds strength in quietness and confidence. However great the time may be that separates us from the fulfillment, it does not matter. In quietness and confidence shall be your strength. Living thus upon the promise causes us to be constantly active, pleading continually upon the Word of God; indeed, faith is purified to such an extent that it clearly sees, and increasingly knows, the promised salvation. Thus it was with "these all" of whom Paul speaks. Oh, let us examine ourselves by this, so that we may know whether we may have something of that living hope in our hearts! God gave His people the promise—not to rest in it, but to be exercised with it. This exercise of faith will cause increasingly more to be seen, for they have seen them afar off, and were persuaded of them, and embraced them. Keep courage, people of God! From afar you view the promised salvation, sometimes from so very far! But would that lessen your hope? Would it not rather encourage you to believe? Would it not encourage you to forsake all things in order to partake of the glory of Christ? May the scales fall more and more from our eyes; and your hearts be aroused to continually embrace the promise and to be exercised with the promised salvation. Oh, how the world would fall away; and earth would lose its importance!

They have confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth. I hope the next time to come back to this. I would now only mention that living faith makes us loose from the world. "Behold, see my need!" So we call out as David often does, when our souls cleave to the dust. For faith produces such a different life; it loosens all bands, and sets us in a large place. May the Lord grant us that while we are in this life, we may walk in that faith, and after we have served the counsel of God, may He cause us to die in that faith. And since these sad times are evident even in death, and a hardened sinner often remains at ease to his very end: superficial Christendom rejoices about its "heavenly home" and God's true people often walk in darkness. May it be given us to have a close walk which speaks of God's grace and faithfulness, and then one day receive an abundant entrance into the everlasting kingdom.

These all died in faith.

CHAPTER XVI

Another Country

"For they that say such things declare plainly that they seek a country. And truly, if they had been mindful of that country from whence they came out, they might have had opportunity to have returned. But now they desire a better country, that is, an heavenly."

—Hebrews 11:14,15,16a

A stranger and a pilgrim seek a home. Those who are strangers and pilgrims on earth cannot find their happiness in this world. Their city and native land are above! "They that say such things" are those who have no rest here on earth; they have found death in everything outside of God. By grace they have learned to understand that the world passes away with the lust thereof. All that this temporal life offers cannot satisfy their hearts. God wrought in them a hunger and thirst for communion with Him. They had to leave all the things in which they lived by nature: their friends and companions, their entertainments and sins; everything, yes, everything must be forsaken—even their righteousnesses. Their souls yearned for God's blessed favor. And where shall that communion be fully enjoyed? Here in this life there is only a beginning of that heavenly joy; here, by faith, only the first fruits are enjoyed. But God shall be fully known by His people when the warfare is over—in that city above where nothing shall enter that is unclean or that works abomination; where all that is imperfect is excluded; where God in Christ shall be glorified eternally—there in that city which God Himself has prepared; in that other country which those who have confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth have sought by faith.

God's work in His people has two aspects. Life in the world becomes death; but another life is revealed to them by faith.

We know that here we have no continuing city. Even the heathen have spoken of our stay in this life as likened to sojourning in an inn. Cicero wrote, "Nature has given us a lodging place, and not a permanent place to dwell." Indeed, that is evident for everyone. Every person must die. Although no one can deny this, we live as if we shall never leave this earth. We do not know ourselves here

as strangers, far from it. On the contrary, deep in our hearts we cling to Satan's words: "Thou shalt not die." Our home and heart is here below; we are of the earth, earthy; all our pleasure is in sensual things. Truly, the religion of many, indeed, even our Reformed confessions have not caused us to alter our lifestyles. Oh, no, for this we need heart-renewing grace. Otherwise we have only a Christianity according to the fashion of the day. How then would we desire a better country? Do we then not desire to go to heaven? Thousands think they do. However, how do they show that they are seeking this heavenly country where God is perfectly glorified in His own? Do they show it in their Christian feasts and friends? In their attending Christian football and tennis games, etc.? Or possibly they show it in their dislike of the true experiential life of God's people? Do they show it in their scoffing of those who love the Lord in sincerity? No, and again, no!

By nature we do not seek the country that is above. We do not want to go to heaven, we do not want to be saved in Christ alone, unless God makes our life in this world impossible and causes us to find death in all that previously was our life. Then we also shall leave Ur of the Chaldees and a yearning shall grow in our souls for communion with God. Oh, here God's people learn to seek God so that, by faith, relieved from curse and wrath, they may learn to know *that* God, being reconciled in the blood of the covenant!

Yes, their hearts yearn to be with the Lord eternally. For Paul that was far better. Thirsting for God is an infallible mark of grace. David sang about it in Psalm 42: "As the hart panteth after the waterbrooks, so panteth my soul after Thee, O God." And in that strong utterance of faith which Job expresses in the 19th chapter of his book, My reins are consumed with longing to see God, whom I shall see for myself, and mine eyes shall behold, and not another. They do not find themselves at home in this world. Their heart goes out to heaven; they seek another country.

Oh, that God's people would have more of this faith in lively exercise! In practice it is often so different. Also David had to complain, "My soul cleaves to the dust"; behold, see my need. But, no, the world does not offer satisfaction and contentment. The waters of the Red Sea have closed behind them. To return is impossible. May God's grace enable us to show more and more that we seek another country, in that we are strangers and pilgrims on earth.

It is also true of those known by God to whom Paul refers in Hebrews 11, that they could not return. "If they had been mindful of that country from whence they came out, they might have had opportunity to have returned."

Have their thoughts never gone back to Ur? Were they then beyond the strife of carnal lusts? God's people experience otherwise. Oh, their soul grieves when they notice that the world

occupies a greater place with them than the glory of God! Of Israel we read (and for those who have left Egypt this is no strange matter) that they yearned for the flesh pots of Egypt. Would a believer have remained a stranger to this? Would Abraham, Isaac, or Jacob never have known such yearnings? Would the world never have tempted them with its fleshly charms? Why then did Abraham say Sarah was his sister? Why did he want Ishmael to live in his home? Why did Jacob give his heart to Rachel, more than to Leah? Why ask more questions? All of these were people subject to like passions as we are. But by faith they conquered their natural desires. They had no desire to return. Oh, the thought alone can distress their souls, and the assaults that one day they may fall back can frighten them so much! For God knows that in all sincerity they have bidden the world and sin farewell. Let Orpah return if she will, the choice of their soul was as that of Ruth. And would they then still turn back?

Neither their kindred in Ur, nor their difficulties in Canaan, could ever cause them to decide to return to the land from which they came. This is what the apostle intends to say: faith is the victory that overcomes the world. It shall never yield in the battle. The genuineness of faith is also known by its perseverance. He that shall strive to the end shall be saved. So many turn back when they have gone half-way; with Orpah, they love Moab and cannot cross the border. However dark their path may be, the true work of God lifts up the soul to look forward to a better country, that is, an heavenly. The Lord sustains and preserves His people from falling away from Him. God's people cannot go back. They had time enough to return. From the calling of Abraham to the death of Jacob was about two hundred years; indeed, they had time enough to return, but they had no such desire. How emphatically Abraham commanded his servant Eliezer, even forbidding him with an oath, that he should never bring his son thither again. Had not the Lord drawn him out of Ur so that He might be a God to him and to his seed? Jacob also returned from Laban's house. God Himself guided him in the way and Jacob left, after he had sojourned there as a stranger. Again, they had the opportunity but by grace they had no desire. Their salvation and happiness lay elsewhere. God was their salvation. Their eye was upon Him; by faith they esteemed lightly all that is below, expecting eternal glory. If our soul may taste something of that glory of God, our life will be marked by a detestation of the things of the world. Oh, that perseverance of faith! Yes, they had time but they would not; the pleasure is gone out of it forever, although our hearts may be busy with it, but only to the distress of our souls which long for a better country. But now they desire a better country, that is, a heavenly.

Their hearts were set upon that for, by faith, God had given

them a look into the heavenly city. Indeed, here God's people taste the first fruits of eternal glory. It is not a strange heaven which God's children have in store for them. Oh, no, the glory which the Lord has prepared from before the foundation of the world is revealed to them here! Paul may have been caught up in the third heaven in a special manner, but God's people are not strangers to such experiences, to the perfect glory above, to the eternal jubilation of the saints before the throne: "Thou hast redeemed us to God by Thy blood." Our words are insufficient to express what is tasted in those blessed experiences, that are satiated with divine love. Would the heart then not be desirous for that heavenly Canaan? Here the struggle, the trouble and sorrow remain; here is sin, which shall soon be laid aside; here are the tears, which shall soon be wiped away; here is the darkness of shadows, which shall be no more in heaven. Is it then not a comfort for God's people that He shall guide them with His counsel and afterward receive them to glory? Yet a little while, people of God, and you shall be forever with the Lord. Oh, that we may lightly esteem whatever the world has to offer, so that we may truly exercise a real desire for a better, that is a heavenly country, the land of Immanuel!

Poor worldlings! May God open your eyes to the incorruptible inheritance of them that fear the Lord. Compare the joy of eternal salvation to the worldly joys of your life; your theater, your sports, your feasts, your amusements. Must you not admit that in all of it lies the grief of sin? Be honest; does the service of the world and of sin give satisfaction to your soul? Does true happiness evolve from your wealth, honor, and respect? Superficial Christians, do you remain strangers of that experience of faith? Do you want to know about it? Do you want to glory in a healthy faith, but not have the conflicts or experiences of God's people? You think: those depressed people, those miserable wretches, those groaners! And you say that they take it too seriously. And still *their* souls are filled with eternal joy. And you? All of you are traveling through life cold and empty, poor and blind. And what shall your end be? May the Lord grant you to see it. Your end shall be eternal misery, where God will not be glorified in perfect songs of praise, but will be cursed day and night! Unconverted soul, stranger of heavenly joy, whether a sinner or one who is glorying in an expected entrance into heaven, may God grant you grace to leave your country, to lose your life by forsaking the world, and to surrender your righteousness while it is still called today. Look at the people of God: those people whom you consider to be poor are richer than you are with all your goods. Look at them, and desire their happiness, which is not given them for naught.

No, it is not always misery in the lives of God's people. The beginnings of eternal joy are laid in their heart. A longing is

awakened in their heart, a longing for God. If matters are right, there is in their heart an agreement with the ways of God; they desire to serve God's purpose, but nevertheless, with Paul, they have a longing to be with Christ which is far better. May the Lord refresh our hearts continually so that we may show more and more that we are strangers and pilgrims on earth by seeking a better country.

Citizens of the city which God has prepared for you in His sovereign mercy: May your hearts live more above the earth in this comfort that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us.

CHAPTER XVII

To be Called Their God

"Wherefore God is not ashamed to be called their God: for He hath prepared for them a city."

—Hebrews 11:16b

With great emphasis the Lord declared in Exodus 3:6, "I am the God of thy father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob." And again the Lord spoke to Moses in verse 15, "Thus shalt thou say unto the children of Israel, The Lord God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, hath sent me to you: this is My Name forever, and this is My memorial unto all generations."

The ever-living, only, and true God who made heaven and earth out of nothing, and who upholds all things by the Word of His power, was willing to be the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. He, who is and was and shall be, the Jehovah with whom there is no variableness, neither shadow of turning, declares Himself to be the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. He, the Elohim, to whom belongs all might and power, the God of gods, took Abraham into His Covenant, and for him and his seed He became the Jehovah Elohim, the Lord God. The condescending love of God is incomprehensible and His good pleasure unfathomable. He entered into a covenant with covenant breakers, with men who had fallen in Adam, with unfaithful ones. Out of idolatrous Ur He called His elect to enter into a covenant with Him, in order to be a God to them. Who shall ever fathom that love of God?

God entered into a covenant of works with man who bore His image. Also that covenant testified of the deep love and affection of God for His creature who, compared to Him, is as a drop in a bucket and as the small dust of the balance. But what comparison has that first covenant, the covenant of works, with that of grace, in which God wants to be the God of salvation for His elect? God established His covenant, not with man who bore God's image, but with fallen man, with Abraham whom He called out of an idolatrous land; and with his seed, with all those whom the Father had given to the Son, with all those who are included in the second

Adam. For, in Christ, God is the God of those people eternally.

The covenant of grace is from eternity. In the time of God's good pleasure each one whom the Father has given to the Son is actually incorporated in that covenant. Oh, let us watch against the sad error that is coming to the fore in our days, that the covenant of grace is only an external covenant! Holding to this viewpoint robs the covenant of grace of all saving grace. And what is a covenant of grace without grace? What kind of covenant would that be? Heyns imported this viewpoint from America; R. Van Mazijk wrote a brochure in the same strain. In the Christian Reformed Church (in the Netherlands) a catechism book appeared for the children that also favored this enervating doctrine. They disapproved of Hellenbroek's catechism book. They were not ashamed to say that Hellenbroek is entirely wrong when he teaches that God establishes His covenant only with the elect, and that the sinner enters this covenant when "God first comes to him when He kindly and beseechingly invites him with much earnestness and uprightness, and solves all his difficulties." According to many who degrade the covenant of grace, Hellenbroek is wrong when in his beloved catechism book he continues:

Qu.: *What is the result of such an invitation?*

Ans.: "I drew them with cords of a man, with bands of love." Hos. 11:4.

Qu.: *What does the called sinner do from his side?*

Ans.: He accepts the Lord as his God and surrenders himself to God. Song of Solomon 2:16.

Qu.: *What are the characteristics of this consent?*

Ans.: The sinner does it calmly, willingly, humbly, faithfully, uprightly, with a full assenting of the demands as well as to the promises of the covenant. Ps. 51:6, "Behold, Thou desirest truth in the inward parts: and in the hidden part Thou shalt make me to know wisdom."

Ask God's people to testify, is it not in your life as Hellenbroek teaches us here? Was that not the desire and experience of your soul?

But they who are at enmity with this doctrine want to ascribe an essential and actual being in the covenant of grace to all who are baptized and are outward professors of the truth. Thus they externalize the covenant, of which the main content is that God is the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, and of all His people. "This is My memorial unto all generations." No, we cannot agree with a viewpoint that robs the covenant of grace of its greatest grace. God's people also learn to understand it differently. God wants to become their God when He enters into the covenant with them, as He passes by them in the open field, and sees them polluted in their blood, and says to them, "Live; yea, I said unto thee when thou wast in thy blood, Live. Yea, I swear unto thee, and entered into a covenant with thee, saith the Lord God, and thou becamest Mine."

What an eternal wonder it is that God is the God of such a people! What an unutterable privilege it is to be brought into covenant relationship with the one only and true God! Everything in the establishing of a covenant is His work. He seeks the sinner. He draws the sinner away from his first covenant head. He determines all aspects of the covenant. He fulfills the conditions of the covenant. Everything from the beginning to the end is the work of God. It is a one-sided covenant. God is the God of His people. He is their all. He is their portion for time and eternity.

But now the Apostle not only says that God will be the God of His people but that He thereby receives honor and glory. "God is not ashamed to be called their God," but there is every reason to be so. "Thy father was an Amorite, and thy mother a Hittite." Indeed, there is every reason for God to be ashamed to be called their God, the God of such despised, unworthy, damnable, and unfaithful forsakers of God. There was every reason for God to be ashamed, when viewed from the side of man. But here all is grace, and only grace. God will be glorified in base, despised and unworthy people. This greatly magnifies the wonder of God being the God of His people. We are sometimes ashamed of God's children, and ashamed of the Lord's cause, as Peter who denied his Lord and Master in the hall of Caiaphas. But God never despises His people.

Although others despise me, God will not despise the affliction of the afflicted. Oh, people of God, humble yourself under the greatness of that wonder! The Lord is not ashamed of you or of being called your God. He wants to glorify Himself in such a people. His perfect attributes are satisfied in Christ for your sake, in Him who was dead and is alive and has the keys of hell and of death. In Christ, God has attained His honor for your sake so that in you He shall be perfectly glorified. No, God is not ashamed of His people, neither in heaven, nor on earth. One day He shall be glorified perfectly when His people shall praise Him day and night before His throne. God found you in the mire of sin and iniquity. He drew you out of the state of death. Would He ever forsake His own work? Never! "For the mountains shall depart, and the hills be removed; but My kindness shall not depart from thee, neither shall the covenant of My peace be removed, saith the Lord that hath mercy on thee."

Now are not God's people a glorious people? They are God's people and God the Lord is not ashamed of them.

And we? In these days so many of us are ashamed, and would prefer that no one knew out of which circles we come. In the office, in the shop, and in the factory we conform ourselves as much as possible, and keep to the background. Be honest, young people, and older ones, do you want to be counted among those whom the world despises, those who dampen the world's spirit? Will you

acknowledge that you go to church where you may hear God's Word? The disdain of the world is often too heavy for you to bear. You would much rather relinquish some values in order to conform to those who glory in their wickedness. By such acts and words, and in your heart, you are forsaking the people of God for the world and its deplorable service. Oh, consider it seriously. It is the beginning of a downward way that has led so many to ruin. Lately I was asked about a girl who had come from the country to work in Rotterdam. She neglected catechism classes and church attendance. She changed jobs. Her father and mother lost contact with her, and did not know where she lived. She went out into the world with her friends. God's people, the church and His services were totally despised. She did not want to be counted among God's people. I am writing this as a warning to all of you, boys and girls, and to you, parents. Do not send your children from the country to the city without supervision, to the city so full of wickedness. Do not just surrender your sons and daughters to such frightful temptations. But aside from an illustration like this, let it be a serious warning for all of us to respect God's people highly. Follow their footsteps. You will never be sorry. Be afraid of the pleasures of the world. May God reveal to you the bliss to be found in serving Him, the greatest happiness of God's people. May you learn to make the right choice for your life with Moses, Ruth, and Rahab the harlot. God's children may be poor in this world, yet they are a rich people, of the highest nobility, heirs of God and joint-heirs with Christ. Oh, look with holy envy upon the privilege of those people, and hear what the Apostle testifies: "God is not ashamed to be called their God."

This is the privilege of all those who are known by God. Your privilege, your true welfare, your honor and glory, people of God! Let the world, also the religious world in these days, scorn you, abuse you, and mock you — does this privilege not compensate for it all? May your heart yearn to experience by faith that unfathomable privilege. Come, you who are standing afar! The Lord wants to be called your God; come and hear His invitation of love in Christ. Abhor yourself in dust and ashes; consider yourself worthy of death and hell; mourn over your sins and iniquities; cry out, "Depart from me; for I am a sinful man, O Lord." Or say with the centurion, "I am not worthy that Thou shouldest enter under my roof." Then the wonder shall be all the greater that God is never, never ashamed to be called your God.

The genealogies of the ancestry of Christ according to the flesh mention the worst and most despised people. The conversion of Manasseh, the forgiveness of the notorious woman in the house of Simon the Pharisee, the blessing bestowed upon the thief on the cross, the restoration of David and Peter, and so many other

examples are all proofs that the Lord is not ashamed of you, and that He will not cast you away. It is His delight to be your God, the God of your salvation. Your soul shall live!

Then do not be ashamed of Him either. Too often there is in us a false shame which leads to a denial of the Lord's Name and of His people. We are often too proud. "Come with Me," the Lord continually calls to us, "Come with me from Lebanon." Yes, people of God, come down from Lebanon. The myrtle trees grow in deep places.

Finally, "God hath prepared for them a city." Here lies the strongest proof that the Lord is not ashamed of His people. He wants to be their God forever and ever. He does not look upon His favored ones as they are here in their miseries. He knows them as His people in perfect glorification. In His eternal good pleasure He prepared for them the city that has foundations, whose Builder and Maker is God. That city is the kingdom prepared for you before the foundation of the world. And to the comfort of all His people Christ has said, "I go to prepare a place for you." There God shall eternally and perfectly be glorified by and in His people. There, in that city, whose streets are of gold, there shall be no more sin, no oppression, no sorrow. There God's people shall praise Him, their God and Lord forever. There they shall not keep silence. Oh, highly privileged people, keep courage, and count the oppressions of the world light; despise the contempt and scorn you are shown! God is not ashamed to be called your God, for He has prepared a city for you.

CHAPTER XVIII

Abraham's Offering

"By faith Abraham, when he was tried, offered up Isaac: and he that received the promises offered up his only begotten son, Of whom it was said, That in Isaac shall thy seed be called: accounting that God was able to raise him up, even from the dead; from whence also he received him in a figure."

—Hebrews 11:17-19

Incomprehensible are the ways of God with His people! Abraham is promised a son and . . . given a son. In that gift the creating power of God's gracious faithfulness shines forth gloriously. And in that son shall all the nations of the earth be blessed. Out of Isaac the Messiah shall come.

But now notice! Before Isaac has a son, even before he is married, God's own mouth commands, "Offer him upon one of the mountains which I will tell thee of." How is that possible?

Certainly, God's Word cannot fail. God's eternal counsel cannot ever change. That counsel stands more firmly than the mountains.

Does God's command go contrary to God's decree? That is also impossible. There is nothing contradictory in God.

But isn't that command to sacrifice Isaac an enigma?

No, not any more. For the Word of God casts a full light upon this command. In the decree of the Lord God it not only lay firm that Isaac would live, but also that Abraham's faith would be tried by commanding him to offer Isaac.

But what must that commandment have been for Abraham, for the father of the faithful, who had built all his hope upon the promise of God!

Nothing but an inexplicable command. Yes, more than inexplicable. Abraham was the father of that boy. That command must have gone into the very marrow of his bones! Everything is added to make the demand as heavy as possible. Read Genesis 22:2, "And He said, Take now thy son, thine only son Isaac, whom thou lovest, and get thee into the land of Moriah; and offer him." Do you understand?

Thy son. And more, God's command emphasizes: "Thine only

son." God demands everything, even the object of love: "Isaac, whom thou lovest." It is unbearable for human feelings. Every word cuts into the father's heart. Certainly, this is the climax of all the trials in Abraham's life.

Once upon God's command Abraham left father and mother, his country and all his kindred; and he went by faith. Abraham had to send Hagar away, but also Ishmael, his son, because the son of the bondwoman would not be heir with the son of the freewoman. Abraham was privileged by faith to sacrifice his natural love.

But both his departing from his own country and his sending Ishmael away were only a prelude of what must now take place. The son of his love, the child of promise, Abraham must not merely send away, but he must sacrifice him, kill him with his own hand.

This command of God cannot be understood. It is an impossibility.

That is the trial of faith. God demands of us what we cannot spare—our name, our respect, our friends, our liberty, our trade, our life. Moreover, His way here seems to be contrary to His own Word and work. Our understanding cannot fathom such ways; our flesh fails. But this all takes place so that God will be the strength of our heart and our portion forever.

That is a temptation from God. It says, "When he was tried." Yet "God does not tempt any man," says James. No, God tempts no one to evil. In Scripture the word *tempt* often has an evil connotation. Thus Satan tempts. Christ taught His people to pray so the evil temptation might be averted. "Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil." Therefore Satan is called the tempter (Matt. 4:3). But tempting does not always mean tempting to evil. Often it means to try or test. With such temptations the Lord comes to his favored ones to humble them, to make them ashamed of their unbelief and doubt, as we read in Psalm 81, "I proved thee at the waters of Meribah." When God tempts His children, it is for their benefit, for the confirmation of their faith. Of this Abraham is a proof in the sacrifice of Isaac.

Oh, sometimes the ways of God are so deep! God spares neither flesh nor blood. Let it not seem strange to you if the Lord takes you through the most grievous paths, if He takes away the desire of your eyes, if He removes lover and friend from you, if He asks everything of you. He does not ask it of you without purpose. The trial of your faith is much more precious than gold. And that gold is tried by fire; could the trial of faith then take place without the heat of the fire? No, not without the fire of oppression and adversities, God's incomprehensible dealings. However grievous it may be for flesh and blood, the trial is precious. Faith issues out of it in full glory.

Faith is a grace that is tried. The many nominal Christians of our days are strangers to these trials. They have a faith that is so

great, so strong, that it rises above all trials. Their own conscience misleads them; the devil does not bother them, and they are strangers to God's testings. Piteable self-deceivers! True faith is a thorn in their eye; an object of their mockery. But if God does not prevent it we fear that they with their supposedly "sound" faith will fall into perdition. For the eternal welfare of your soul, seek to try your faith according to that proven faith which is described in the Word of God, and observe how it passes the test.

Of Abraham we read: that he offered Isaac; that he accounted God able to raise him up from the dead; and that he also received him again from the dead in a figure.

Only by faith was it possible for Abraham to submit himself to God's command, for all reasoning to cease, and for this father who had received the promise to offer up his only son. No, it did not actually take place; that was not necessary. But in his heart Abraham had surrendered Isaac according to God's direction. Early in the morning Abraham went to Moriah with Isaac and two young men. He climbed the mountain; he built an altar; laid the wood in order; bound the son of promise; yes, laid him on the altar with the wood. According to God's command, Abraham was ready, with knife in hand, to kill his only son whom he loved. Abraham gave his son to the Lord. That was God's purpose.

Then the angel of the Lord called out of heaven, "Lay not thine hand upon the lad, neither do thou anything unto him: for now I know that thou fearest God, seeing thou hast not withheld thy son, thine only son from me."

Abraham offered his only begotten son. Faith enabled him to do so. Oh, how strong faith is, faith in the promise that in Isaac all nations would be blessed! Even out of death God can give back that son, regardless of how the matter went. Isaac could not be taken away before he begat a seed. If God had demanded death, he was able to beget life again. Figuratively speaking, Abraham received his son out of death again. Abraham gave him, and he who was given was returned to him. Faith caused Abraham to say, "God will provide Himself a lamb for a burnt offering." Only true saving faith made him walk in the way of surrender, and kept him from falling when experiencing the deepest trials. God crowned that faith with His special favor and blessing, as Genesis 22:16-18 emphatically describes that faith to us which finds rest only in the sacrifice of Christ, in Him, the Lamb that was slain in the place of His people.

How wonderful faith is! It does not reason. All those reasonings, calculations, oppositions, and rebellions that so often distress our souls are of us. Faith is submissive and *follows*; this is possible because faith causes the soul to rest only upon God's Word, upon Him who cannot lie. How often you may have experienced that, when your way was contrary, when apparently nothing of the

promised salvation could be realized, when faith, though hotly contested, could not let go of the promise of God. What the Lord has promised cannot be taken away from the soul. The heaviest trials cause faith to root more firmly and to come forth more gloriously.

May the Lord thus enliven faith in our hearts, so that, also in darkness and when God hides Himself, we may rest upon the Word God has spoken to us. The Lord shall never put to shame those who trust in Him. May our soul be as a weaned child with his mother, silent before God. May our heart desire the confirmations of faith by lively exercises, rather than having rest for the flesh. May God's work shine forth in the spiritual seed of Abraham, which will be tried by God, but will never be forsaken by Him.

CHAPTER XIX

The Faith of Isaac

"By faith Isaac blessed Jacob and Esau concerning things to come."

—Hebrews 11:20

Often the examples Paul gives to prove the faith of the Bible saints are very surprising. Does the blessing of Jacob and Esau show strong faith? Esau is a reprobate, and the way by which Jacob obtained the blessing is full of unbelief and human frailties. From a human standpoint we would not in the first place present the blessing of both sons as evidence of Isaac's faith.

Regarding Isaac himself, he loved Esau more than Jacob, only for the venison. It is written plainly and explicitly in Genesis 25:28, "And Isaac loved Esau, because (here follows the reason why) he did eat of his venison." Evidently the venison could make everything right. It certainly was not hidden for Isaac what a worldly, rough, unholy life Esau led. Esau's wives, Judith, the daughter of Beeri, and Bashemath, the daughter of Elon, were a grief of mind unto Isaac and Rebekah. Were not marriages with heathen women entirely in conflict with God's will, revealed in the calling of Abraham? Had not Abraham, in his care for Isaac, taken a wife for him out of the land of his kindred? Was not Esau's marriage an evidence and fruit of his godless life? Was that not enough to show Isaac that God hated and rejected Esau? But carnal prejudice had the upper hand, even in this old pilgrim, and caused him to say, "Behold now, I am old, I know not the day of my death: Now take, I pray thee, thy weapons, thy quiver and thy bow, and go out to the field; and take me some venison; and make me savoury meat, such as I love, and bring it to me, that I may eat; that my soul may bless thee before I die." Where do we see in Isaac's conduct anything of faith, or of the holy consciousness that the blessing wherewith he blesses will include the spiritual and eternal salvation given by the Messiah? Where is there a seeking of God's countenance? It may be that Rebekah had kept as a secret, also from Isaac, what God had revealed to her before the children were born, that Jacob was God's elect. But it remains Isaac's responsibility that he did not ask

the Lord or inquire about His will. Partiality, aroused by savory meat, and prejudice for the rough, outspoken, profane Esau, inclined the old father's heart, for whom once in his young days Ishmael, the mocker, had to leave.

Isaac is to be reproved. Isaac reveals himself here in his human weaknesses. But how can Paul praise this blessing as Isaac's act of faith? Certainly, the blessing does not become noteworthy when we notice the steps Rebekah and Jacob take. Disregard Esau. He is a profane person, a mocker, a despiser of his eternal salvation. For a pottage of lentils he sells his birthright. He has no interest in eternity. "I am at the point to die: and what profit shall this birthright be to me?"

But also the godly, richly blessed Rebekah takes measures that are contrary to the childlike confidence of faith. God had revealed to her His eternal counsel, His sovereign good pleasure. She knew that God loved Jacob and hated Esau. The life of both sons was a complete confirmation of the secret God had revealed to her. If anyone was to wait quietly to see what God would do, it surely should have been Rebekah. And behold, this mother resorts to guile, lies, and deceit. She urges Jacob to use deceitful means and takes the consequences, yes, the curse upon herself.

Is that faith?

And what shall we say of Jacob? He pretends to be Esau; he lies, he deceives, yes, he uses God's Name in his base deception, which was even more detestable since it was committed against a blind father. Must the blessing be obtained in such a way?

Is God not able to take care of His own work? Oh Jacob, as long as you live you shall bemoan this deception.

And still, Isaac blessed both his sons by faith. It may appear incomprehensible, but it is true. God the Holy Spirit declares it. Scripture does not cover the sin of Isaac. God sees and also hates the sins of His saints, and He has recorded Isaac's actions for us so that the Word would reveal to us an evil which can so easily rob us of spiritual liveliness. Carnal love and human affections so often have such an important place in the hearts of God's children; they are the cause that God's good pleasure may be concealed and His salvation so hidden for us. These affections restrain us from asking God's counsel, and from seeking the favor of the Lord. May grace triumph and mortify human prejudices in us. The difficult lesson of dying to flesh and blood is practiced too seldom. Isaac, and later Jacob, who preferred Rachel above Leah, prove it. And still flesh and blood shall not inherit the kingdom of heaven. Isaac will have to part with his Esau, and Jacob with his Rachel. It is recorded in the Bible, people of God, so that we by faith may forsake whatever is too attractive to our flesh, before God takes away the desire of our eyes, much to our sorrow. Oh, that we might die daily!

And still Isaac blessed Esau and Jacob by faith. Was the spoken blessing not an evidence of the firm faith in the promise of God to his seed? Isaac might be mistaken in the object of the promise, but by faith he embraced the promises themselves. Although both Rebekah and Jacob remained fully responsible for their deeds, God's government, which also rules over sin, took care that through the terrible deception of both of them, the blessing would be applied as it pleased Him. Thus Isaac spoke of the blessings of God's promises, namely, that God would be the God of his seed, and that all the families of the earth would be blessed in that Seed. How could Isaac have spoken as he did if he did not with true faith trust in the promise of God? How could he have confirmed the blessing with so much determination against Esau's bitter complaint, saying, "I have blessed him, yea, and he shall be blessed"? How could Isaac according to God's sovereign good pleasure have spoken the blessing that made Jacob a lord over his brother, if he did not believe the promise of God? Through it all Isaac's faith was fixed upon the salvation of the Lord in the seed of Abraham. We may censure, reprove the evil in Isaac, as well as in Rebekah and Jacob, but in the depth of their hearts they embraced by faith the truth of the promise of God. Between them and Esau lay a very deep abyss, for Esau did not know the value of the promise; he lacked faith, he rejected it in unbelief.

Indeed, a dreadful separation lies between you who are strangers to God and His service, who boast of your openness and honesty to those who by faith look to the promises of God, in contrast to God's children who have nothing to boast of. Oh, let Esau be a warning example to you! Do not trample upon your salvation any longer. Go no further upon the pathway of the world. You will inherit only temporal blessings in this life. Esau also received them in Isaac's blessing. The blind father spoke also to him of the future. By faith Isaac discovered the future also in Esau's blessing. But the temporal blessing was lost at death. Never, no, never did Esau find the place of repentance. Shall that be your portion? Shall your name, as that of Edom, become a curse? Poor worldling! May God open your eyes for your state of misery. Now it is still the time of grace for you. Shall you despise that time for a dish of lentils that the world offers you? Let Esau's state be an admonition to you in your sinful life. May God open your heart to seek Him while He is to be found.

Isaac spoke of future events while blessing both his sons, and it was by a faith which clung to God's promise, even through the darkest ways.

Indeed, it is often thus in the souls of God's children. The women sought the living Christ, but among the dead. Thomas wanted to see and touch before he believed. Even Abraham took Hagar instead of Sarah.

God's work can also be hidden. The fulfilling of the promise goes through impossible ways. And then our unholy hands so often reach for the holy things of God, and the flesh so often draws us from the right path. Alas, what would become of the work of God if the Lord Himself did not care for His own? But He has prayed that their faith fail not. Notice, people of God, whether there is not in your own soul among all of this a cleaving by faith to the promise of God. That Word which the Lord spoke to us sank so deeply into our souls that it cannot be erased even in our darkest times. It is engraved in the stone of our hearts. Faith expects the fulfillment. But how? In a way that man falls outside. Isaac, Rebekah, and Jacob, guilty as they are and grieving about their lives, shall praise the Lord's own work. For the Lord has done it. He took care of His Word and promises through the depths of sin. He executed His good pleasure. That, and that only, is the reason why God's work does not fail. And if God's people obtain the fulfillment of God's promises and the performance of His counsel in their salvation, then we shall experience: "Through Him, through Him alone, Whose presence goes before us."

Oh, people of God, sink away in that wonder. God crowns His own work, and testifies of the faith of His own which He has wrought and maintains.

CHAPTER XX

Jacob's Blessing by Faith

"By faith Jacob, when he was a dying, blessed both the sons of Joseph; and worshipped, leaning upon the top of his staff."

—Hebrews 11:21

Again the Apostle confirms that faith is the substance of things hoped for, and the evidence of things not seen, by an example out of the life of the patriarchs and by renewal an example taken from the blessing of Isaac's sons. Paul saw Isaac's faith especially in his blessing of Jacob and Esau, and Jacob's faith is shown in the blessing of the sons of Joseph. God's Word brings the exercises of faith from out of the depths where we would not identify faith. If we were asked about Jacob's faith, we would think about Bethel, where the way of salvation was revealed to him, and even more about Peniel, where the conquered one conquered, where the guilty one was justified. Who would first look at Jacob's deathbed? Yes, Jacob's death was a happy death. But if you want to hear about Jacob's faith on his deathbed, then listen to the blessing of Judah, the rich prophecy of Christ, "The scepter shall not depart from Judah, nor a lawgiver from between his feet, until Shiloh come." Or if you desire a more glorious testimony of the faith of the dying Jacob, then consider the longing of his soul for the salvation prepared in Christ, "I have waited for Thy salvation, O Lord." That is faith. Yes, many would like to repeat these words after him, but although we repeat these words, they have no meaning without faith. In dying, Jacob awaits the salvation in Christ. Dying is not death for him. For him death is gain. That, you see, is the language of faith, which arouses jealousy. But who thinks first of all about the blessing of the sons of Joseph?

With Isaac the main factor was partiality; mere, natural partiality for Esau who fixed the venison as his father liked it. But with Jacob it was preference for Rachel and for Joseph, a preference so obvious that Joseph's brothers hated him because of it. Does Jacob's natural love, which was contrary to God's sovereign good pleasure, give to Joseph, also when dying, the double portion of the firstborn? Was it partiality for Joseph even upon Jacob's deathbed? No, not at all.

Jacob blessed by faith, not out of sinful partiality. Soon he shall show proof that he had learned to know God's good pleasure which had chosen Leah, not Rachel. That was already evident in the blessing pronounced upon Leah's son, Judah, but it becomes more clear when he commands that they should bury him by Leah's grave. No, Jacob does not bless from natural motives. God's Word tells us, "By faith Jacob blessed the sons of Joseph."

But may this then serve for our instruction and for our amazement that Scripture brings faith from depths where we would not easily discover it. We see faith in great and powerful things, but God who Himself works faith, discerns it in its most hidden operations. He can say of the simple faith of the centurion in Capernaum, "Verily I say unto you, I have not found such great faith, no, not in Israel." If we may see faith in its true exercise, we shall often cry out in amazement, "Is that faith?" Yes, God's people can be led back in their way, and when light shines upon the work of God, and the Lord reveals faith in the depths, oh, then those people become so small before God and acknowledge that God is great, but we know it not. Thus the Lord draws our attention to faith and its soul-blessing work. He leads us back in our ways so that we shall acknowledge His work.

Truly what God's people cannot call faith, the Lord will show to be faith. Oh, then that assent, and that confession: "Lord, then I have already received grace at those times; that was then Thy work!"

In the examples which Paul gives we may certainly notice with amazement that the Holy Spirit wonderfully gathers the testimonies of faith.

Jacob blessed the sons of Joseph by faith. With Joseph and his sons, Jacob dealt particularly and at great length. Sinful partiality did not drive him, but rather his love for the God of his fathers. To him Joseph and his family must remain united. Was there not an unspeakable danger here? For many years Joseph had been in the court of Pharaoh. Ephraim and Manasseh were born and brought up in Egypt. Would Joseph and his seed not choose the glitter of Egypt above the salvation of despised Israel? Would the estrangement which was the fault of Joseph's own brothers be permanent, and would one of Jacob's sons with his family be estranged from Jacob's God? That occupied Jacob's thoughts until his last days. With all that was in him Jacob bound not only Joseph but also both of Joseph's sons to his house, to his family, being separated by God out of all the world, and endowed with the revelation of salvation in Christ. By faith Jacob, when he was dying, embraced the promises of God; by that faith he blessed the sons of Joseph. Egypt with all its riches, Pharaoh's court with all its glittering splendor and titles, and positions of Joseph, all that and so much more, was

nothing in Jacob's eyes compared with the salvation of the Lord which he embraced by faith, and that constrained him to bless the sons of Joseph.

Faith despises the world because of the blessedness which there is in God and His service. Show your faith by your works, and especially by contempt of the world. Moses is also an evidence of this, as well as Rahab the harlot, Ruth the Moabitess, and all God's people. For faith discovers such a heavenly, unutterable, all-surpassing, eternal glory and blessedness in God, His service, and His people, that the whole world with all its glory is as nothing compared to it. Jacob tasted this blessedness especially when He was at the end of his life. How clearly he gave evidence of this when he took both the sons of Joseph as his own sons, the same as Reuben and Simeon, and blessed them! Oh, that the actual blessedness prepared for God's children in Christ might have more the upper-hand in them. Alas, our soul must complain so often that we cleave to the dust. The world with all its cares and burdens, our flesh with its corrupt attraction to the pleasant things of the earth, yes, all that is from below often exercises so much pressure that faith must be strengthened in order to break through it all. And still, where does our soul find satisfaction except in the favor and fellowship of God? May our life be more dying to the world, so that also in our death there may be the power and clarity of faith which can fill us in the last hours with the eternal good from above. Truly such a death is no death. In it is the victory of death through faith in Him of whom Jacob gave a dying testimony.

How clearly Jacob's faith also spoke in the blessing of Joseph's sons, consciously preferring Ephraim above Manasseh. Ephraim was the younger one, and Joseph acted according to the birthright when he led Manasseh and Ephraim to Jacob in such a way that his right hand was laid upon Manasseh. But God's thoughts are higher. His sovereign good pleasure does not bind itself to natural order and age. Led by the Spirit of God, and in the consciousness of faith, Jacob crossed his hands. When Joseph saw that as a mistake, the old father said emphatically that he was not mistaken but was doing it consciously, "I know it, my son, I know it." Faith makes no mistakes. Oh, the sovereignty of God! Ephraim above Manasseh! Jacob had found his life in it—he instead of Esau! On his deathbed he would see and proclaim that same sovereignty over his sons, yes, over the seed of his sons.

Can the soul ever sink deeper than in the good pleasure of God? Oh, that eternal sovereignty that moved God, that caused the ground of salvation to be in Him from eternity, the immovable ground; for the foundation of God standeth sure, having this seal, the Lord knoweth them that are His! The sovereignty of God—He passed by His people in the open field, and said, "Live, in thy blood,

live." It was as a brand plucked out of the fire. Oh, the free sovereignty of God!

*Why did Thine eye fall on me,
When so many souls are going
To a dark eternity?*

Can God's people sink deeper? Can faith find a deeper ground?

By faith Jacob blessed the sons of Joseph. Yes, by faith! When he was about to die, he worshiped, leaning upon the top of his staff. Sink away in adoration, people of God! Oh, cry out:

*Thou art, O God, our boast, the glory of our power;
Thy sovereign grace is e'er our fortress and our tower.
We lift our heads aloft . . .*

Jacob leaned upon the top of his staff. In Genesis we read nothing of this. We read only that Israel bowed himself upon the bed's head, and that he strengthened himself and sat upon the bed. They are fools who say that Jacob worshiped the top of his staff, as a token of his authority; foolish idolaters! Jacob worshiped God. For Him, and Him alone, Jacob's soul bowed down, and he did so leaning upon the top of his staff. With that staff he had walked many years; that staff had been as it were a witness of God's deliverances, so often glorified in the life of Jacob; that staff, worthless as it is, spoke volumes to Jacob. Just as homes and rooms, however small and despised, and places and ways in your life, people of God, sometimes speak loudly of what God has been for you. If we may only bow in the dust, bow down before God as Jacob was privileged to do, then God becomes great and the bitterest ways give you the richest reason to proclaim the Name of God.

Poor sinner, who has never yet bowed before God. You are willing to bow for the world, for a football star, for a movie star, for sin, also for your own virtue and righteousness, which shall not stand. But you stand erect before God. Incline your ear, while it is called today. "Hearken unto Me, ye stouthearted, that are far from righteousness." "Lift not up your horn on high; speak not with a stiff neck . . . For in the hand of the Lord there is a cup, and the wine is red; it is full of mixture, and He poureth out of the same, but the dregs thereof, all the wicked of the earth shall wring them out, and drink them." You shall drink the dregs; God's full wrath shall strike you unless you will bow under Him in this life. Oh, think seriously about your death, about the day when you shall have to appear before God! Flee, I pray you, flee from sin; renounce your own life. May God grant you by grace to worship Him, in whom alone is life and eternal salvation.

Let the wicked run round about you, but how different their death shall be from that of Jacob and of all who by faith have found their salvation in God. Come then, people of God, keep courage.

Does the staff in your hand speak of many oppressions and adversities? When faith is stirred up a bit, the same staff shall speak of the mighty acts of God, causing you to forget all sorrow. May that faith strengthen us to forsake the world, to reckon the oppressions small, and to be crucified to the world, so that an entrance into the kingdom of God shall be ministered unto us abundantly. Despise death which is swallowed in victory. Yes, scorn it by faith, and bow before the God of salvation, whom Jacob worshiped, leaning on the top of his staff.

CHAPTER XXI

Joseph's Commandment

"By faith Joseph, when he died, made mention of the departing of the children of Israel; and gave commandment concerning his bones."

—Hebrews 11:22

Joseph had more of the love of his father than his brothers had; he, the son of Rachel, was given to him in the climbing of his years. In favoritism there is much that is offensive. Everyone can sense it when a father favors one child above another, and it is reprehensible, especially when his actions show it so clearly, as was the case with Jacob. How very careful parents must be so that their children do not experience such favoring of one above another. In Jacob that partiality was very strong. For that matter there is much in all of Jacob's life that is according to the flesh, is very carnal, and is not according to God's will. He loved Rachel more than Leah, also Rachel's children, and especially Joseph more than the others. All this did not fail to have a harmful influence on Joseph and his offspring. Far into the history of Joseph's family we find the desire for that which is great in the world, for that which excites the senses and the emotions.

Jacob laid the foundation for this. He was struck with the beauty of Rachel's physical characteristics when he met her at the well where she had come to water the sheep. Jacob was especially happy with Rachel's son. Rachel's death was more than grief to him; his life was broken, crushed.

The old father bestowed on Joseph the same degree of love he had cherished for Rachel. And what kind of love? A coat of many colors which revealed in bright hues the carnal affection that enflamed envy in Joseph's brothers.

These traits of the flesh have placed their mark upon Joseph, and that now requires our attention. In the son we find the traits of the father, Joseph's love for natural beauty. All Egypt bows down before Joseph in the dust. One of the beauties of Egypt wins the love of his heart. His brothers kneel before him. He is surrounded by royal pomp and splendor. Yes, even the blessing that the dying Jacob lays upon him reveals the same attraction. This natural trait

which we notice is evident in the prophetic ministry Jacob had received. A double portion is given to Joseph. Reuben's portion is given to Rachel's firstborn, but only regarding external matters, for the blessing refers to temporal prosperity only. The best of the best in Canaan shall be for Joseph and his numerous offspring. "Joseph is a fruitful bough by a well; whose branches run over the wall." This is the rich picture of prosperous growth. The blessings of Joseph shall reach unto the utmost limits of the everlasting hills. It seems as if there is no end to that blessing. Prosperity, much temporal prosperity, shall be the portion of Joseph.

But, and this is the great difficulty we encounter here—how can we harmonize faith with that desire for temporal goods? Speaking only of Joseph now, how can Joseph's heart be set on these things when a godly life reveals itself so differently!

Think of Abraham who left Mesopotamia and all that is in it to follow God to an unknown land; yes, that is faith.

Look at Moses who forsook Egypt, his entire beautiful and regal future, and that to suffer affliction with the people of God. In Moses true faith shows itself unmistakably.

Think of Rahab, the harlot—what went on in her soul when she left her idols and risked her life because she loved God's people more than her own people.

Or notice the unmistakable difference between the two young Moabitish widows who accompanied Naomi. Observe how God's people shall despise everything of the world, when the world comes in opposition to the salvation which God has prepared for His elect.

Oh, everyone who knows something of that life which is given of God is no stranger of this characteristic! They have made the sincere choice of heart of which they shall not repent. Even though they may have to beg for their bread, it would be more desirable for them, than to have the abundance of the wicked, if they might only be counted among God's people.

But how then can we harmonize that trait in Joseph's life with the unmistakable characteristic of a new life?

In the first place, Joseph's childhood already testified of the fear of God. Childlike fear kept him from walking with his brothers in the paths of sin. Joseph grieved about sin. He was not a self-righteous tale-bearer, even though his brothers considered him as such, but the fear of the Lord caused him to avail himself of every means to keep the sons of Jacob from sin. Moreover, the Lord had revealed Himself to Joseph in a wonderful manner. God had prepared honor and glory for him, but through deep ways. He was led away into slavery, but the Lord was with him. A dreadful temptation came upon him. What withheld Joseph from committing the sin to which the wicked wife of Potiphar tempted Him? He says it himself, "How then can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?" Imprisonment becomes

Joseph's portion, but there also God is with him. The prophecy is going to be fulfilled. The butler may forget Joseph, but God does not forget him! Soon Joseph is placed second in command to Pharaoh in the land of Egypt; regal glory is his portion. And then? Joseph repeatedly glorifies the grace and goodness of the Lord and gives God the honor. "For God," said he, "hath made me forget all my toil and all my father's house," and at the birth of Ephraim he says, "For God hath caused me to be fruitful in the land of my affliction."

Oh, notice, my reader, neither in the most bitter adversity nor in his greatest prosperity did Joseph forget God. The Lord is with him; but also by grace Joseph remembers the God of his fathers. Egypt is for him the land of his oppression. In this he is one with the nation that shall be oppressed for four hundred years until God prepares the day of deliverance.

In this treatise, I am not now speaking of Jacob, but I will only remark that whatever sinful human trait you see in this father and son, grace triumphed over it. Do not look upon God's people, Joseph also, from only one side. Take notice, that in all temptation and the most terrible, unrighteous oppression, and also in his magnificent renown, the fear of God did not depart from Joseph. Was he not also tempted, "Curse God and die?" Did not the luxury of Egypt place before him a thousand snares? But for him temporal things were not of the highest importance.

We will understand this if we take notice of what Paul repeatedly mentions in Hebrews 11, that through temporal blessings faith embraced eternal benefits in Christ. May the Lord keep us as He did Joseph. So many who are brought up under the Word of God, and grow up amid many tears and prayers, perish in their misery, cursing God. A dark cloud of bitter curses rises day by day from so many thousands who cry out about the injustices of the world; they call out, "Where is God?" While they are strangers of the guilt of sin, they boldly demand their rights. Away with God! Away with the Bible! Away with religion!

Poor rebels! Look at Joseph who met God in prison, and walked in a God-fearing manner. Oh, gnash no longer on the stone, but look upon Him who casts it. May your heart be humbled before God. Return to Him and His Word before the Word shall condemn you eternally.

How many there are who cannot endure luxury! They backslide. Riches, honor, and worldly pleasures are of more value than God and His service. Vain man! Joseph walked in the fear of God in Pharaoh's court, and cannot you keep God's Word, although you are in a much lower station? Are your circumstances, and your station in life not conducive to that? Soon you shall reach the end of life. Naked you shall leave the world. A poor Lazarus, despised by you here, shall testify against you eternally.

How happy then are God's people! They have durable riches. Oh, may the Lord always have the greatest value for our souls! We would then cleave to Him, seek to win Christ, and esteem His favor more than the whole world. God's people have knowledge of such times. When their souls are living far above the dust of the world, and are filled with the love of God, the whole world is worth nothing to them.

But, alas, there are so many other times when we must say with David that we are become like a bottle in the smoke which has lost all its moisture. Christ has no glory. There is almost no salvation in God. His service leaves us cold. His people with whom before it was a pleasure to spend our days and nights, and for whom we sometimes neglected our food and drink, we now avoid. The harps hang upon the willows, and the world has won the love of our hearts. Consider whether this is a reflection of yourself!

Oh, that the Lord would return! May He draw us out of the deadness into which we have sunk. May we with the church seek the Lord again. Oh, people of God, seek Him in the streets and in the broad ways of the city! Arise and return to your first husband, for then it was better than now. Yes, also then when you were oppressed or in poverty and humility, it was better than many other times of prosperity and greatness in the world. He who stands high above the circumstances of our lives, draws us so that we shall run after Him. Turn us, and we shall be turned.

God preserved the faith of Joseph. Especially on his deathbed there was evidence of this. Paul mentions two evidences. When Joseph died, first, he made mention of the departing of the children of Israel: and secondly, he gave commandment concerning his bones. Yes, that was by faith. You need not doubt it, for God Himself said it. That ends all gainsaying.

Joseph spoke to his brothers, for some of them, such as Levi, were still living. "His brethren" may also mean his family. Joseph gave commandment. He took an oath of them, indeed, a serious oath, as related in Exodus 13. Convinced that the oppression would begin soon and would not end soon, Joseph wanted to obligate the coming generations concerning his bones. He did this because he firmly believed what God had promised, that one day the posterity of Jacob would return to the promised land. In that promise of God Joseph embraced the salvation promised to the church of God. It was a promise of salvation, of the rest that is prepared for God's children eternally in heaven. This was the hope upon which Joseph rested at the time of his death. Because of his firm faith he obligated his brothers with an oath to carry his bones with them, which they fulfilled. Four hundred years later Joseph was buried in Shechem. Did Joseph give that commandment to strengthen his brothers in the faith? Was it to prevent the Egypt-

tians from practicing idolatry with his bones? However that may be, Joseph gave evidence that his life was not in Egypt. For him Egypt had been a land of oppression. His entire life testified of his faith in the promises of God and that his happiness and salvation was with the people of God. With them he desired to live, and to be with them in his death. Then Joseph could die, with living faith in the promises of God.

Oh, may the Lord vouchsafe us to rest unconditionally upon His Word and promises! People of God, this is sufficient not only in life, but also in the agony of death. For faith overcomes the world and death. It reveals the salvation which God has laid up for those who fear Him. It drives away doubts. How precious God's promises are for faith, since He who promised is the faithful One who does not depart from His Word. We have to do with an unchangeable God. May He be our hope and our strength both in life and death.

CHAPTER XXII

Moses' Parents

"By faith Moses, when he was born, was hid three months of his parents, because they saw that he was a proper child; and they were not afraid of the king's commandment."

—Hebrews 11:23

It is remarkable that the faith of these parents is described in such a way that our attention is fixed especially upon Moses. Moses was hidden. He was the person who was destined by God to deliver Israel. The faith of the parents was very closely allied to this. This also explains the meaning of the words, "Because they saw he was a proper child." This took into account more than natural beauty. We need not deny the natural loveliness of the little baby; that would do violence to Scripture. But neither may we confine this text to his outward appearance. Owen, in his precious explanation of the Epistle to the Hebrews, observes that the Hebrew word here translated "proper" was used by God when He approved of His creation, "And, behold, it was very good." We also read of Rebekah that she was very fair to look upon. So also Moses had a very comely appearance. The Lord drew the attention of his parents to it, and enlightened their eyes to see in the exceeding beauty of the child, as Stephen speaks of it, the special calling to which God had destined this child for the deliverance of that people appointed to die. In this beauty there was something supernatural. The child was fair, as it is expressed in Acts 7:20. This caused the parents to spare the child, in spite of the harsh commandment of the king.

Out of the depth of misery faith lays hold on the deliverance of God in Christ. In the testimony of Moses' parents we again see the proof of this. It was a dreadful time of distress for Israel. The oppression under which the people sighed was terrible. The politics of Pharaoh turned against the seed of Abraham with intensity. Every infant son born was doomed to die. The midwives were commanded to kill every newborn son; and if they did not obey this cruel order, because they feared God, the Israelite himself had to cast each male baby into the river. The grief and fear that beset the

people cannot be described; what matchless oppression became the lot of the Israelites in Goshen! Lost!—that was their case. Doomed to die—the people of God! But that cannot be! Although all Egypt rages against them, God shall take care of His own and of His Word, to the fulfillment of His promise. “I am that I am” is the guarantee of Israel’s deliverance. And that is what Moses’ parents embraced by faith.

That is the characteristic, the nature of faith. Read where you will in the Scriptures; read likewise the confessions, the forms of unity of our church and you will find faith described as appropriating Christ and His righteousness. Faith without Christ is not true saving faith. It seems to me that one of the very serious tendencies in these days is that many think faith consists of emotions and activities which give no evidence of a need for deliverance in Christ. You may have many experiences, tears, and prayers, but if you make them your ground, you are building on a sandy foundation that one day shall fall away. Truly, this soul-deceiving description of faith cannot stand by itself. It is rooted in a lack of discovering light. There the ground for building lies in everything outside of the only foundation. Their case never became a lost cause before God; it never resulted in a dying to self. Their lost state in Adam, in whom we all fell away from God, remains hidden for them. Hundreds speak about faith and experience, but remain alive in their own strength. I pray you, examine your heart that you do not mislead yourself. We must all appear before the judgment seat of God, and how shall we ever stand before God without the deliverance that is in Christ Jesus? On this side of the grave we must learn to know by faith out of what misery and death God redeems His own. Faith is always exercised out of the depth of our lost state. God’s people learn to know something of what it means to be lost. Israel’s state of deep misery becomes *their* state before God. Their language is, “My soul refused to be comforted.” Heaven and earth testify against them. There remains no escape! They shall die, to bear the just retribution of God’s wrath eternally! But oh then, that true faith! Out of that which was cut off, out of that which was lost; that embracing of God’s Word; that opening in Christ; that appropriating of the promise, and in further exercise, that union with the Surety and Mediator Jesus who redeems and liberates them from death! That is what Amram and Jochebed believed when they saw that the baby was a goodly child. Pharaoh could threaten as much as he pleased; could breathe murder and destruction against God’s elect, but have no fear! Unto God belong the issues of life and death.

What a richly blessed family! Father and mother were one in the exercise of faith. The Holy Spirit names both of them here. Amram and Jochebed were bound to one another not only by the marriage bond, but also by the bond of faith. In so many marriages

it is different, sadly different. So many of God's children must experience in marriage the fruit of their thoughtlessness. Two shall lie in one bed, the one shall be taken and the other shall be left. What a double privilege there was in the parental home of Moses; both father and mother feared God and embraced, by faith, the deliverance which shone forth for them in the beauty of their child. Therefore they refused to cast him into the Nile. Pharaoh's command was directly contrary to the promise of God. It was one of the two; either God is unfaithful, or Pharaoh's commandment must be nullified. And then the parents of this child embraced God's promise by faith, and did not doubt. God shall multiply the seed of Abraham as the stars of heaven, and as the sand which is upon the seashore. Indeed, He shall do it in Egypt. Would Pharaoh's commandment bring God's promise to naught? Impossible! Again, that is the exercise of faith. It embraces the promise of God; it rests through the promise in God who cannot lie. Scripture does not mention any special revelation to Amram or Jochebed. The Jewish historian, Josephus, does. But didn't the promise of God give sufficient assurance for their faith? Let us cast aside all miraculous revelations. God teaches His people by His Word, and strengthens their faith to appropriate and lean upon His promises. Faith finds a sufficiency in God and His Word. Thus it was with Amram and Jochebed. Indeed, their faith was so greatly enlightened that they recognized, in their child, the person by whom God would work Israel's deliverance. Moses later had the same thoughts when he slew the Egyptian. Seeing in the exceeding beauty of the child the glory of God upon him, the parents received so much light upon the promise of God that they believed God would give deliverance by this child.

How firm is faith in the promise of God! Even if, according to human reckoning, that which God promises seems to be impossible, faith does not consider the circumstances. Are not all things possible with God? Yes, the work of God is tried; the fulfillment of the promise is cut off; the work of God is violently attacked. But again it is true that faith rises up out of the depth and rests in God.

Has God forgotten to be kind?

Shall I His promise faithless find?

Oh, people of God, keep courage! No matter how much the enmity of Satan rages, the Lord confirms His Word. God is not a son of man that He should lie. Soon you shall see your Redeemer. All the powers of hell shall be crushed to pieces upon the unchangeable faithfulness of the eternal Being. Let the fearful ones here become strong, as it is written of these parents: "And they were not afraid of the king's commandment."

It was a commandment to be feared—that dreadful command-

ment of Pharaoh. No home was safe. The servants of the king executed the order; no child was safe; no father or mother was safe. From the days of old the world has often ruled against God's poor inheritance. With the most dreadful tools of hell they have attempted to destroy the church of God, but . . . in vain. People of God, let not the bitter hatred of the worldlings, even though they may be very religious, seem strange to you. Let not their severe oppressions discourage you. The Lord shall give the victory to His people. Soon you shall escape their claws. Thus Moses' parents were strengthened, "And they were not afraid of the king's commandment."

But they did not act imprudently. By faith they hid the child for three months. Vanity is a characteristic of our nature, but not of faith. Glorifying in faith is different from boasting. Faith humbles us; causes us to realize our own weaknesses; seeks shelter in the cleft of the rocks; places its trust in the living God, in Him alone. But do not therefore despise the means at hand. David could not die; he was the anointed of the Lord, but still he hid himself from Saul. Canaan was meant for Israel, but Joshua led the people very prudently. Moses' parents hid their child three months by faith, and they were not afraid of the king's commandment. Thus God binds the life of faith to the means. But faith does not put confidence in the means, but in Him who alone can deliver.

May we be granted true faith. Reject the superficial faith of our days—the vain boasting of those who mistake historical faith for saving faith. For truly, at death we shall come short if that is all we have. The life of faith upon the promise is a trusting in the promise given to us when we are totally lost in ourselves. God does not speak except when all human hope is cut off. The entire list of God's promises here serves as evidence. May that be our life, people of God. Let us come down from the heights upon which we rest, yes, from our highest experiences, so that our life may be that life which causes a poor sinner to rest in the promising God and to embrace the deliverance that is prepared according to the promise in Christ Jesus. Then our soul shall enjoy the comfort that life upon the promise offers, for God cannot lie to David.

CHAPTER XXIII

Moses' Refusal

"By faith Moses, when he was come to years, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter; choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season."

—Hebrews 11:24-25

After Paul has pointed to the faith of Moses' parents, he now deals with the faith of Moses himself. Truly here the apostle uses a great and striking example, which should make a deep impression especially upon the Hebrews. For who was equal to Moses? In opposition to the gospel of Christ the Jews appealed to him. Out of the hand of Moses Israel had received the law and the service of the ceremonies, in which they sought their life. But Moses lived by faith; therefore, it follows that law and faith do not oppose each other. The lawgiver himself lived by faith. Does this fact not disarm all opposition to the gospel? If one would appeal to Moses, should he not follow his faith? And how did Moses show the power and truth of his faith? In this, that he refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter.

Some expositors identify this act of faith with the slaying of the Egyptian. For in Exodus 2:11 we read: "And it came to pass in those days, when Moses was grown, that he went out unto his brethren, and looked on their burdens: and he spied an Egyptian smiting an Hebrew, one of his brethren. And he looked this way and that way, and when he saw that there was no man, he slew the Egyptian, and hid him in the sand." Stephen states that Moses was then forty years old (Acts 7:23). But it seems to me that we must not particularly limit the faith of Moses to the age of forty. Was he a stranger of that faith before he was forty? Or did that faith live in his heart for a long time already, which caused him to become one in spirit with his people who were so heavily afflicted, and to look upon Egypt with scorn? Faith caused him to go out to his brethren—the die was cast before he slew the Egyptian. But Moses' faith was powerfully expressed by this decisive act against the Egyptian, and soon it was evident by its own work. However much faith may sink because of many struggles and doubts, and

souls may be ready to die, the powerful work of the Holy Spirit makes the dumb to speak, the lame to walk, and the weary to run. The decision was made. May it comfort many downcast souls and embolden them, "for why should I be as one that turneth aside by the flocks of thy companions?"

How wonderful was the way in which God led Moses! The trial was a heavy one for the parents who by faith had hidden him for three months when he was a baby. Surely it was hard to lay this little child in an ark of bulrushes in the water, but it must have been no less difficult for them to give him up to Pharaoh's daughter and to the vanities of the Egyptian court, after his mother had nursed him. There was, however, no neglect in this, as with many parents who allow their children to go into the world and pay no attention to temptations or wicked environments. Far from it. The circumstances show us that Amram and Jochebed were united to God's way, and by faith, trusted in the Lord who was able to protect their child, also at Pharaoh's court. And their faith was not put to shame. No, true faith knows no shame. It is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen. Do you know something of this, parents, regarding your own children? Are you sometimes bound to the throne of grace, so that you cannot stop praying for your children? However deep God's ways may be, the outcome shall reveal the uprightness of your faith.

For years a mother in Scotland left her door unlocked, kept the light burning, and the room heated during the winter, for she had hopes that her only daughter would return. The daughter had gone in the way of sin, and had been seen in the attire of a harlot, far from home. No admonitions were able to hold her back, but God heard the sighs of this mother and did not put her hope to shame. She had been mocked so often, but her child did return. Will God not hear the supplications of His people? Pharaoh's daughter adopted Moses to be her own son. She called him Moses, that is, "taken out of the water"; and he kept that name. Under God's providential guidance this name, Moses, continually reminded Moses of the wonderful deliverance by which God had saved him from death. This was well-known to him; also the fact that he belonged to the despised nation of Israel. His circumcision reminded him of it. Did not his mother tell him of it? She had not only nourished him in his earliest years, but continued to instruct him about the true God and the blessed people whom the Lord had chosen for Himself.

Nevertheless, neither his circumcision nor the most tender care of his parents alone could stir up faith in Moses. Neither baptism nor education in themselves can renew our hearts. Faith is a gift of God. But God uses means to work that faith (Rom. 10). Well then, here are two means ready at hand, which reminded

Moses that he did not belong to the Egyptians. God blessed and sanctified those means, making faith so powerfully active in Moses that he refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter.

This was no small matter. Adopted as her own son, Moses had his place among the princes of Egypt. He was instructed in all the wisdom of the Egyptians, and humanly speaking, the most promising future was prepared for him. We need not accept what some secular writers say, that through adoption by Pharaoh's daughter, Moses was destined for the crown. It is enough that Paul speaks of the treasures of Egypt, for in those days Egypt was one of the richest lands of the world. Riches, honor, respect, joy—all that the world can give, was prepared for Moses.

And all of this he despised, rejecting it with disdain. "What a fool!" says the world.

Indeed, such a refusal certainly seems foolish to one who seeks his life in the world, to those who desire to know nothing more than the things of time and sense. And it must sound more foolish still to natural men when they hear that instead of all the splendor and greatness and treasures, Moses chose rather to suffer affliction with the people of God. God's people were an abomination to the Egyptians. The world regards them not; yes, the world hates them. Moreover, in Egypt they were in a very sad condition of misery in their slavery. Tell me, what was attractive about those people? Who would choose to suffer affliction with God's people, yes, much affliction, in slavery, in poverty, in unrighteous oppression, rather than to enjoy the prosperity and grandeur of the world? Who? He, who with Moses, has learned to know the life of the world as a life of sin. Does it not say so in Hebrews 11? "Choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season."

This is a portrayal of your life, you who serve the world, who are unconverted in heart and have never learned to choose by faith as Moses did. It is a two-fold offense for many, but so it actually is. You are living in the enjoyment of sin, but the poor despised people who groan are the people of God. Oh, that God might give you eyes to see and hearts to observe! The enjoyment of sin is but for a season, a moment and it is past. You are enjoying it to your heart's content, *but* Satan spreads his temptations throughout a wide area—the theaters and football games, the crown of worldly sports are the boast of our nation—also through the Olympic games which draw thousands upon thousands. Exhibitions and amusement parks give opportunity to enjoy various pleasures, including circuses. But modern Christendom says, "You need not shame yourself! Even 'Christian' persons enjoy these pleasures, also on Sundays." Food and sports is what the world offers plentifully. But . . . for a season. A worldly life does not give actual satisfaction. And

what it does give you to enjoy is transient . . . for a season. *You* are created for eternity. What then, when soon your pleasure will come to an end? What then? You who serve the world and still confess to be of the Reformed religion! What then? If you by grace have not forsaken all that is of the world and have not learned to despise it, then your pleasure shall become eternal grief, and God shall appoint you a portion where there is weeping and gnashing of teeth. Oh, may the Lord cause the pleasure of the world to become sin for you! Look upon the people of God and notice their blessed end. Here they have the Lord as their portion, and their end shall be eternal peace.

How poor the whole world becomes for us with all that belongs to it, when the Lord works in our hearts. Then our whole life outside of God becomes sin. Oh, how empty are those people whose lives are wrapped up in the world! A full world cannot satisfy; a large world becomes too small for them. God's judgment threatens eternal perdition and along with the knowledge of sin this is confirmed. It is just. Sin, the joys of the world, the treasures of the world, all that keeps us apart from God and His service and His people, becomes despicable; it becomes as death. The Lord places the salvation of His favored people in opposition to this. Oh, how happy those people are! They are reconciled with God and restored according to His image. It is not only because they are going to heaven that they are happy. Many consider God's people to be happy for that reason only, especially when death is threatening. But convicted souls consider these people happy because they are reconciled with God. Their lives are far above all the pleasure of the world. Even if they would have to beg for their bread, no greater blessing could be their portion than to belong to these people of God. They look upon them with holy jealousy. Yes, those people are their people. Like Rahab the harlot, they would risk their lives for them, for the God of those people is truly God. They would give up all of Moab to share with Naomi the unknown future. What Moses experienced is in their hearts: "Rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin." That choice has a deep root. Just read what is written in the following verses in Hebrews 11.

CHAPTER XXIV

Moses' Choice

"Esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures of Egypt."

—Hebrews 11:26a

The deep root of Moses' choice is explained by the apostle in verse 26. We should never *seek* oppression and reproach nor should they in themselves attract us. "Seek not a deep way, but a clear way," was the advice of the older people. If then Moses chose rather to bear reproach with the people of God than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season, it was not because oppression was so pleasant, but because of the blessedness Moses saw in those despised people of God. They were his people, and that had more value for him than all of Egypt, notwithstanding all the reproach to which they were subject. In the previous chapter we pointed out that this becomes the choice of all God's people. The world becomes death to them. And although they would have to beg for their bread with the poor people of God, to be the least among God's favorites is better for them than to enjoy the abundance of the wicked. In humility they sing:

*All those who fear Thy Name
Shall my companions be.*

And Paul now declares that in the oppression of Israel Moses saw the reproach of Christ, and he esteemed this reproach to be greater riches than the treasures of Egypt. This testimony is of great importance. It reveals the marrow of the salvation of God's children, namely, the reproach of Christ; that is their true happiness, their salvation, their riches. And when Moses' eyes were opened for that, he chose this salvation instead of Egypt.

The reproach of Christ. No, it is not merely the suffering of Israel, as a type of Christ; nor the reproach to which Christians in later years would be exposed. Those who explain Paul's word in this way rob it of all inner strength with the apparent purpose of denying saving faith to the people of the old covenant. How could the believers of the Old Testament days then be saved? Without Christ? Without faith in Him? It was also true for them that he that believeth not on the Son lies under the wrath of God and

abideth under it. Has there ever been another way of salvation than in Him who said, "I am the way, the truth, and the life?"

He was promised from the beginning to be the Seed of the woman whose heel would be bruised by Satan. He was promised to Israel as the seed of Abraham, which would be restored from death (not figuratively, but rather by His actual conquering of death). Is there any other way to be saved, except in Him? God's Word teaches us that there is but one Name given under heaven whereby we must be saved. He who seeks his salvation outside of Christ shall be eternally lost. Here lies the gulf between God's people and the world, between Israel and Egypt. All hatred, enmity, and persecution springs forth from enmity against Christ. Thus also the seed of Abraham was hated because it embraced the promise concerning Christ. The reproach of Christ, of which the apostle here speaks, is the reproach which Israel experienced for Christ's sake because of faith in Him. Here lies the nucleus for the oppressed people, "for," says Owen, "all outward services in the church in all ages are only confessions of that faith." The pith or marrow is in the people who have been quickened. This is what you must remember. The church, the covenant of grace, has a visible form. But now we may not use the form in place of the essence, and say: "the covenant of grace is established with all the natural seed of Abraham." No, according to its essence the church is a holy congregation of true Christian believers, all expecting their salvation in Jesus Christ. The Catechism does not state that the church is a visible gathering of baptized people. The Rev. Jongeleen teaches such a doctrine. But Lord's Day 21 teaches us that Christ gathers to Himself a Church of which I believe I am a living member. It concerns living members. All the others are but chaff which shall one day be burned with unquenchable fire. But the living seed bears the reproach of Christ because it seeks salvation in Him alone, hoping upon the promise, of which He is "all and in all."

Do not continue thoughtlessly in your walk. You must examine the life of your soul by this doctrine. Many place the case of God's people in a different light. It appears that many assume to know a way of salvation outside of Christ. Or do we not see in them a spiritual blindness that they consider a few stirrings of conscience, which go away as a morning cloud and as the early dew, to be signs of true life? How numerous are the people who talk about various conditions, about Psalm verses etc., which occur to them, without ever having had any need for, or knowledge of, Christ!

My dear reader, I feel myself strongly compelled to point out this misleading evil and to warn you against it. Thousands are rich and increased with goods and have need of nothing, but do not know that they are wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked. They can scarcely hide their enmity against a discovering sermon.

They think that those who speak out of the life of Christ are using language which is not understandable. They consider those who would remove them from their (false) grounds as being too sharp. They are "Christians," as strong as trees, but without Christ. Oh, how terrible will their realization be at death! Only a naked sinner who is clothed with the righteousness of Christ can enter heaven. Your tears, your emotions, your frames, in one word, all that is outside of Christ will fall short of covering you before God. The line of demarcation is clearly drawn here by the Word of God. Outside of Christ everything will fall short. I pray you do not reject this admonition. Shun the preaching, the company of those who seek to give you grounds outside of Christ, for they build on a sandy foundation. Examine your souls whether you, with Moses, have esteemed the reproach of Christ greater riches than the pleasures of Egypt.

No, not all God's people are conscious of their salvation in Christ. But it is indeed a fact that even the babes cannot live without that only Surety and Mediator. That is the lively concern of God's children; that is the distressing question of their heart, "Must I miss Christ eternally?" Even with all their soul's experience, there remains a desire, a seeking, and a need for Christ. He is the only "all and in all" for His children who are lost in themselves. And they may understand something of it if the reproach of Christ is richer than the pleasures of Egypt. Oh, how precious Christ can be to their soul; how His promises can comfort their heart! As a hart pants after the waterbrooks, so thirsts their soul after God. If all the world despise and oppress them, salvation in Christ shall sweeten all.

The reproach of Christ rests upon His people, for Christ is one with His Church. Paul calls his own suffering a remnant of the afflictions of Christ (Col. 1:24). Christ died for and in the place of His people. He redeemed His own from the power of death and hell. He is in heaven as their Head. But in His spiritual body, namely His elect, the suffering on earth is still being fulfilled until the last one shall be gathered in. What a comfort in all the sorrow which comes upon God's people—the suffering of Christ! The worldling despises, scorns, persecutes, forsakes you and cannot endure your company; your life is death to him—and all that for Christ's sake. Oh, grieving people of God, bear in your flesh the grief of the reproach of Christ! But your sorrow is not without comfort. In all your affliction Christ is also afflicted (Isa. 63:9).

This caused David to say, "When my father and mother forsake me, then the Lord will take me up." Be of good cheer, God-fearing people. Christ is a refuge at all times. For His sake, the deep gulf was removed by the glorification of His grace. The world must cover God's people with reproach in order to justify themselves. So

they did with Christ. Thus the world has always dealt with God's people. God's dear people are denounced as the greatest rebels, and as a threat and a nuisance to society; they are persecuted everywhere. Egypt is evidence of this. The Israelites were deeply despised; they were an abomination to the Egyptians. Is it then not understandable why the reproach of Christ is spoken of here? It comprehends all the suffering of the church of God which flows out of communion with Christ. What grieves the soul more than revilings and scorn? But the bitter suffering is light and despicable when we, through faith, may truly have an insight into the reproach of Christ. It is greater riches than the treasures of Egypt. What Egypt has is temporal. All the treasures of the world are consumed by rust and moth, and those who serve the world perish with the world. Oh, poor world with all its greatness and violence! But in the reproach of Christ lies greater riches. In it is substance that is constant and durable, riches that satisfy the soul and are inexhaustible.

*Away world; away treasures,
You never can measure
How rich that I am.*

Oh, people of God, may your eyes look more upon the riches of the reproach of Christ! You then could bear your cross joyfully; you would understand the truth of the word of Christ that His yoke is easy and His burden is light. The world with all that is in it, to which your heart cleaves so much, would lose its appeal, and your soul would have something of those things which are above where Christ is sitting at the right hand of God. People of God, the Lord has created you to sing His praise. Cry out to the poor, empty world that the reproach of Christ is greater riches than the pleasures of Egypt. And if this is your portion, what shall your glorification with Christ be one day! It is a tribulation of only ten days, people of God. Soon it will be ended forever, and everlasting joy shall be upon your heads.

CHAPTER XXV

Moses' Flight

*"For he had respect unto the recompense of the reward.
By faith he forsook Egypt, not fearing the wrath of the
king: for he endured, as seeing Him who is invisible."*

—Hebrews 11:26b, 27

Paul not only draws attention to the significance and content of Moses' choice, but also to what it was that caused Moses to decide that the reproach of Christ had more value than the treasures of Egypt: "For he had respect unto the recompense of the reward." The true choice is not lightly made. Many have been somewhat attracted by the life of God's people, and have left the amusements of the world for a time, but, with Orpah, they turned back at the border. They had not counted the cost. Circumstances change; the zeal that was shown for a while diminished, and with the dog they turn to their vomit again, and with the sow to their wallowing in the mire. Has the Lord spoken in vain of the wise and foolish builders, and of the wise and foolish virgins? Both of these fools took the matter lightly; they did not consider the adversities; their actions were superficial, lacking the ground work of true deliberation. That is why the one built his house on sandy ground and it washed away. The others did not provide oil in their vessels and therefore their lamps went out just when the Bridegroom came and they needed it most.

Oh, how many are strangers of the deliberations pertaining to Moses of which Paul speaks in Hebrews 11! They are bitter against those who by grace know what it means to travel to eternity. Many think those people are too strict and say, "Oh, such despondency about man's misery! You must believe, accept Jesus, and hope that the end shall be peace. All God's promises are for sinners. Why should we not accept them? Because we are baptized, we are children of the covenant; grace is sealed to us. Why then worry and doubt?" They write: "The way and the gate to heaven are not strait and narrow. Come to Jesus and that is enough." It is a language that attracts! But it is a language that misleads. Oh, that I may persist in admonishing you to turn your ear away from this lying doctrine. Yes, in Christ is an eternal fulness to save sinners. Even

if the whole world came to Him, His righteousness would be sufficient to pay the debt of everyone. Who shall ever be able to comprehend the fulness that is in Christ? But that fulness is closed to us by nature. We do not want to be saved by Him who alone is the way to eternal life. We choose to perish eternally rather than to be saved by grace. The service of God does not please us, but is death to our nature. No one shall ever make the true choice except he who, through the discovering light of the Holy Spirit, has learned to know his own misery. For those who wish to compare these two: the world with its fruits and the service of God and its recompense—oh, then the decision is not difficult. Then God works in us a repentance not to be repented of; then the world with all its riches becomes despicable, and the service of the Lord becomes our salvation and life eternal.

Thus it was with Moses. He saw. God opened his eyes for salvation in the promise to His people.

If God is pleased to work in our hearts in this way, only then shall we truly see when He plants faith in us and makes it lively and active. The promises of God contain the salvation which can be loved and sought only by faith. Unless our eyes are opened, Christ who is the content of the promise, has no form nor comeliness, but seen with the spiritual eye, He is altogether lovely. In Him is that fulness out of which His people receive grace for grace. This fulness of grace attracted Moses. He had respect unto the recompense of the reward. For there is a reward of grace for those who in the obedience of faith may follow the Lord. No, Moses did not have respect unto the reward of merit. That is of the law. The law curses with an everlasting curse. For by the works of the law shall no flesh be justified before God. The reward which Moses beheld was the reward of grace for one who worketh not, but believeth on Him that justifieth the ungodly. The reward is composed of full salvation for time and eternity in Christ, in Him who was despised and who endured the death of the cross in order to glorify His people eternally. Would that reward not delight the heart of God's people? God wants to be the God of His people, as He spoke to Abraham, "I am thy shield, and thy exceeding great reward." Who can ever think of anything greater? Compared to this, what is the favor of kings, whom God cuts off as grapes from the vine? Compared to this, what value have all the goods, riches, honor, and distinction in the world? Here all things must fade away to nothing. The favor of God strengthens us more than the choicest food; the grace and mercy of God reconciles for all guilt and sin, and fills the soul with peace that passes all understanding. Here is a substance that is constant and durable.

When the people of God suffer oppression and adversities, and are despised by the world, the reward of grace sweetens all their

grief and sorrow. And one day the reward of salvation will follow in that house of the Father of which Christ spoke, "I go to prepare a place for you."

Oh, tell me, my reader, is there anything which exceeds this recompense that Moses had respect for? Who, having ever seen anything of this reward, can look back to the world? Blind as we are by nature, our eyes see only the apparent materialism of the world. Thousands upon thousands of openly wicked and self-righteous people long for the temporal goods of this world. Therefore the Olympic games draw such huge crowds—kings and queens, officials, mayors, leaders, and the common people. For one thing has filled their hearts, namely, the pleasures of sin, the amusements of the flesh. Today the Olympics; tomorrow a festival; then the dance hall and the theater, and whatever else Satan spreads before their eyes. The bait of hell is more alluring to them than the reward of grace which God has prepared for His people. How men in many ways show themselves to be strangers of that life which is of God! Be not deceived; faith does not unite itself with the world. It is one or the other: either the pleasures of Egypt are your portion, or the reward of grace assigned to God's people. They do not fit together. Your soul cannot have both. It is the one or the other. It is impossible to accommodate faith to the world and that which belongs to the world.

Forsake, oh, forsake the pleasures of sin; learn by grace to despise the world and to desire the reward of the righteous. That reward gives satisfaction to the soul in this life, and one day eternal bliss.

The choice of Moses was so firm, that by faith he forsook Egypt, not fearing the wrath of the king; for he endured, as seeing Him who is invisible. How clearly we see in these words that the characteristic of faith to forsake the world is certainly not limited to our first choice of life. Rather, the looking to the recompense of the reward became stronger in Moses by the exercises he had while caring for Jethro's sheep for forty years behind Mount Horeb. The first time Moses fled from Pharaoh in fear, but, having been prepared by the Lord to lead Israel out, Moses no longer feared the wrath of Pharaoh. No bloody tyrant, armed with worldly power that threatened him with death, could make him fear. On the contrary, he himself announced the judgment to the king of Egypt and prepared the people of Israel to leave Egypt. Faith defies all powers of hell, for it sees the Invisible One. God is invisible to the natural eye. God is a Spirit. When Paul then says that Moses saw the Invisible, he means the continual strength which Moses received by faith in God. All the enemies stood before him day by day, but He who called him and who would lead the people out, was the Invisible One. And still, Moses' eye was fixed upon Him. This encouraged, comforted, and strengthened him. Our translators

wrote: "He endured, he encouraged himself in the Lord his God." Faith is the victory that overcomes the world because in God it finds unconquerable strength.

Is this not the faith that God planted in your soul, people of God? It caused you to find all salvation in Christ, and to taste the blessed rewards of the covenant of grace. Oh, what can be compared to the sweet taste of that bliss; what can be more weighty than the recompense which is given by grace? Would you not say with the bride, "If a man would give all the substance of his house for love, it would utterly be contemned?" And in the measure that faith is enabled to be in exercise, Christ becomes more precious, and this reward more valuable. You may lose all by which you formerly lived, become poor and impoverished, complain about all that is in you, but on the other hand, you glory in the grace that can satisfy your soul. That is your privilege in this life. The world has the slave's reward of sin. But certainly you know of something else, the reward of God's favor and blessed communion. That will make you more and more loose from that which is below, and cause you to despise the world. Do not fear her hatred and disdain. No Pharaoh shall harm you. Oh, if their eyes were more upon the Invisible One, then His people would make war with more liberty, and endure tribulation with more patience! Do not, children of God, complain too bitterly under all your adversities. A token of God's favor sweetens all sorrow. A little of the reward of the righteous is better than the temporal enjoyment of the wicked. And one day the full reward of salvation shall be granted you. That is the reward which Christ has merited by His bitter suffering and death—the reward of poor Lazarus, of the thief on the cross, of the striving apostle of the Gentiles, and of all of God's children. It is the reward of eternal, uninterrupted communion with their God and King which is laid away for them. May the Lord open the heavens, and cause us to behold that glory. "Seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus, the Author and Finisher of our faith" (Heb. 12:1,2). In the keeping of God's commandments there is great reward.

CHAPTER XXVI

Moses' Passover

"Through faith he kept the passover, and the sprinkling of blood, lest he that destroyed the firstborn should touch them."

—Hebrews 11:28

We must fix our attention on three things in order to rightly understand the faith of Moses in keeping the passover and the sprinkling of blood; namely,

1. that neither Israel nor the Egyptian could stand before God's righteous anger;
2. that the seed of Jacob was saved according to God's sovereign good pleasure;
3. that Israel's salvation was founded upon the blood of the Lamb.

Israel also was guilty before God and could not stand before the judgment of the Lord. This judgment was exercised in the last plague to come upon Egypt. It is particularly shown in the slaying of the firstborn. The plagues before this, dreadful as they were, served especially to move them to repentance and humiliation by the terror of the Lord. However, in the tenth plague God's judgment is executed. "For I will pass through the land of Egypt this night, and will smite all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, both man and beast; and against all the gods of Egypt I will execute judgment; I am the Lord." Thus Jehovah shall pass through Egypt in exalted majesty to execute judgment. But who shall stand before His justice? Not only the Egyptians must fail here, but neither can Israel stand here. "How should man be just with God? If He will contend with him, he cannot answer Him one of a thousand" (Job 9:2,3). In that consciousness Moses kept the passover and the sprinkling of blood. Faith in the salvation of Christ Jesus cannot exercise itself except in the acknowledgment of our condemnable guilt. This is one of the great truths that offends many in these days. They would rather step over the part of misery, and glory in a Jesus whom *they* accept, and in whom they say they trust because

they have read about Him in the Word and have been brought up in the Reformed doctrine. "Why do we need that knowledge of our lost state? Do we not all confess that we are sinners? Who will deny it? Well then, Jesus came to save sinners. Accept that and you are saved. All that insisting upon a knowledge of misery, the necessity that our sins be revealed to us, and that we acknowledge before God that we deserve punishment, robs us of the joy of faith and makes the Reformed doctrine pessimistic." Thus they reason.

Joyfully and happily they pass through life. They build themselves and others up in a historical conception of the truths of salvation. They are strangers to the struggles of the soul and the bands of death. The experience of the saints has become an object of disdain and mockery. But how can faith in Christ ever be exercised except out of the depth of our totally lost condition? By faith Moses kept the passover when God's justice cast him down under the sentence of death.

The Egyptian does not know of the struggle with the justice of the Lord. He rests in the haughtiness of his heart. But for Israel, rest was cut off in that dreadful night.

All those who shall ever find their salvation by faith in the blood of the Lamb learn by soul's experience what it means to be subject to death. God convinces them and opens their blind eyes for the eternal judgment which rests upon them. The paths by which they are led may differ—whether they know of a clearly discernible change, visible to the whole world, or whether they have been brought up from childhood under the truth, remaining with it and having had many impressions. When the Lord efficaciously works a saving conviction in them, they know themselves to be entirely lost. With all the world they become guilty before God. Both Egypt and Israel were guilty! Oh, that judgment of God! It was the sentence of condemnation that oppressed and gave no deliverance. Whatever was attempted, deliverance became more and more impossible. God's justice must be satisfied. And no mere man can give that satisfaction, not even with many prayers, with hot tears, nor with sweet frames. All the wonders in Egypt could do nothing in this last plague. Israel, however, escaped because God's eternal good pleasure prepared a deliverance. He loved His people with an everlasting love. Oh, no, it shall not be glorified in every Israelite according to the flesh; only the children of promise shall be delivered according to this promise, according to God's good pleasure.

But it is only these that are included: the elect, the children of Abraham who are of Christ and heirs according to the promise. God's eternal good pleasure towards them prepared for their deliverance out of the land of the shadow of death. The Lord shall repeatedly show the tribes of Israel that He did not choose them because of anything that was in themselves, but that He had taken

them as His people for His own sake. This shall be the boast of the Church of God; this was the deep faith of Moses in keeping the passover and the sprinkling of blood. Out of sovereign good pleasure God has made His people His own. For this reason they escaped the deadly grip of the Egyptians. The deep root of salvation lies in the good pleasure of God. However guilty they may be before the justice of God, Israel shall be saved from destruction because God has chosen them to be His people. Those people, condemnable and guilty of death as they are, shall be saved because God wills it. Out of the world, out of sin, out of the bonds of Satan, out of Egypt they shall go, because God claims them as His own. It is this free work of God that causes God's people to cry out in adoration and amazement,

*Through Him, through Him alone,
Whose presence goes before us,
We'll wear the victor's crown,
No more by foes assaulted . . .*

But this good pleasure of the Lord shall only prosper in the hand of Christ. And to Christ and His sacrifice Moses looked by faith, when he "kept the passover, and the sprinkling of blood, lest he that destroyed the firstborn should touch them."

The destroyer passed through all the land of Egypt. Neither bar nor lock could keep him out of the homes. In each home, in the palace and the prison, in the homes of the rich and of the poor, from door to door the avenging angel smote the firstborn. Parents mourned for their children; women lamented the loss of their husbands; lamentation filled the land of Egypt, the cities and villages; all were in deep mourning. Moreover, in the barns, in the fields, and in the streets slain animals were lying. In great anger God smote the Egyptians.

And Israel? She was saved by the blood of a lamb. A select lamb without blemish was slain in the place of these people. The blood of the slain lamb was sprinkled on the lintel and on the two sideposts of the door of the house. Seeing the blood, the destroying angel passed by. The justice of God is avenged in the death of *another*! What a foolish and blind people who can see no further than the animal that was sacrificed! Can the blood of bulls and goats give satisfaction for God's justice? Did not this lamb point to Christ? He is the Lamb of God who taketh away the sin of the world, because He had engaged His heart to approach unto God the Father for the elect. He shall take their place and atone for their sin when He enters into death. By faith Moses looked to Him, to His death, to His blood. He is the passover Lamb.

"Passover" really means passing by, and of Him Paul says, "For even Christ our passover is sacrificed for us." For because of

Him alone the avenging justice passes by, and offers salvation for lost sinners.

Who knows any other way of salvation? Is Scripture not full of testimonies that outside of Him there is no salvation to be found? Well then, by faith God's people shall find their redemption only in Christ. But then everything outside of Him must yield. What preciousness faith then sees in Christ alone! He is the way that leads to life, the only Name by which we can be saved. In His blood is redemption, however great our sins are, even though they are as scarlet and crimson. Yes, in Christ salvation is unspeakably abundant. But that makes Him so very necessary! Without Jesus there is no life, but an eternal loss of the soul.

How then can we find rest without union with Christ? Lacking Him, all things fall short before the justice of God. And it is by faith that God's people find their rest only in true union with Christ; indeed, continually receiving reconciliation in Him. For the passover became an ordinance forever in Israel. Oh the precious blood on the door posts, people of God! Oh that it were given us by faith to find the way of escape only in the blood of the Lamb! May God bind it upon our hearts, and upon each one who is resting outside of Christ, for at death all shall fall short. God's justice is only satisfied in the blood of the Lamb. May it also be urgent for God's people to look unto the rest that is in faith's union with Christ. May our souls find no rest before that. Oh, how little do we hear of this joy of faith in our days! And yet it is prepared for the Church of God. May the Lord vouchsafe us to count all things but loss and dung for the excellency that is in Christ Jesus. Although we deserve the judgment of death, may our souls be continually employed in that exercise of faith which makes us find peace and redemption in the passover that was sacrificed and which Moses kept by faith.

Truly, then we would know something of walking in Christ, even as we have put on Christ.

CHAPTER XXVII

Faith and Unbelief

*"By faith they passed through the Red Sea as by dry land:
which the Egyptians assaying to do were drowned."*

—Hebrews 11:29

If ever faith and unbelief are clearly contrasted in their essence and in their end, it is in Hebrews 11:29. Faith caused God's people to trust in the Lord and submit themselves to His command, and they obtained deliverance. On the other hand, unbelief hardened Pharaoh and his host and caused them all to be destroyed in the Red Sea. Certainly, there is a clear-cut contrast between faith and unbelief.

The passage through the Red Sea also decided the battle between Egypt and Israel. However, that battle contained something more important. In it was the bitter conflict of Satan and the world against the people of God, the conflict which God had placed in Paradise, saying, "I will put enmity . . .," that war which was fought on Golgotha and terminated in the victory of Him who cried out to His Church, "I am He that liveth, and was dead; and, behold, I am alive for evermore, Amen; and have the keys of hell and of death." That same warfare still rages. It shall continue as long as the world stands, but shall end in the eternal triumph of the Church of God over all enemies. The Lord shall make it their footstool. Oh, may God's dear people take courage and cast an eye upon the old covenant people Israel who were so terribly assaulted. Could it have been worse? Could the hellish Pharaoh have done more evil against the Lord's heritage? Can the triple-headed enemy which attacks your soul do worse with you than he did with God's old covenant people in Egypt? He laid his hand upon the root of their national existence. And then, yes then, when the need was greatest, God heard the groaning of His people. He began to plead the cause of His people. And to what end? So that Israel, by faith, could pass through the Red Sea as by dry land, but the Egyptians were drowned. Moses could justly sing this song to the Lord, "I will sing unto the Lord, for He hath triumphed gloriously: the horse and his rider hath He thrown into the sea."

No other end shall crown the warfare of all God's children.

Here already in principle, they become more than conquerors, by faith. And what shall it one day be when the end has come for God's people! Then the enemy shall give up for good; Satan and the world and sin shall then be done forever. Sing, oh people of God, sing ye unto her. But however ecstatic your soul may become, it is but stammering in comparison to the eternal song of redemption which you shall one day sing perfectly there where time shall be no more.

Faith and unbelief are diametrically opposed to one another. They shall one day also be eternally separated from each other, just as God made a separation between Israel and Egypt.

No, not every single one who left Egypt was a partaker of faith. With many of them God was not well pleased; they perished because of their unbelief. And still the whole multitude was saved under the leadership of Moses, and Paul tells us that this was by faith, namely, by the faith of those who had been granted true faith. The godly Owen remarks that the entire multitude is named after the better part, and he adds, "In a confessing congregation it pleases God to ascribe the faith and obedience of some to the whole."

This should teach us to differentiate and not to seek our rest in being an external member of the church of God. So many are only members externally, but it is not enough as was evident in Israel. May the upright people be rightly valued. Their faith helped all of Israel through the sea to escape the grasp of the Egyptians. Look to those people and desire their faith, which saves from eternal destruction, that personal faith, for everyone shall live by his own faith. Here, in fellowship with God's children, we may receive temporary deliverances, but no sinner shall escape eternal destruction, except through a personal union with Christ by faith. The working of that faith is described by the apostle in the passage through the Red Sea as by dry land. Moses describes that passage for us in Exodus 14.

Led by the pillar of cloud and of fire, Israel did not travel along the caravan route from Cairo along the sea coast to Gaza which would have brought them in a few days to the borders of the promised land. No, God had other plans for His Israel than to let them enter the promised land in such a short time.

A wilderness would be traversed for forty years before Jericho's stronghold would fall. Not by a few steps out of Egypt into the land of rest, but only after wandering for years would Canaan be obtained. So much had to be experienced, so much had to be learned before Israel could truly enter Canaan. Oh, let it not grieve us too much if the ways of God are different from what we expect! God's people at times can view themselves so near to eternal glory, and then hope and sing:

*From strength to strength Thy children dear
Go forward till they all appear
In Zion's courts, God's holy mountain.*

Who expected that wilderness journey? Who expected that so much must be experienced? Who expected that the way would be as it must be trodden here? No one! God's ways are higher than our ways.

From Rameses the pillar of cloud went in a southeasterly direction. Along the western sea coast the people were still on Egyptian soil. It is incomprehensible . . . but Israel followed. They were pursued by Pharaoh, but . . . to his destruction. For the last time Pharaoh hardened his heart. "The wilderness hath shut them in," said the king of Egypt. He was sure he would bring back the people who served him. There was no doubt in his mind that the wandering people were in his hand. Chariots and horses and horsemen, all the hosts of Pharaoh overtook the children of Israel at Pi-hahiroth. Before them was the sea; to the right and to the left were mountains. The people were entangled. They could not escape. All ways were cut off; all but one, the way to God was open. We can see that that is the privilege of God's people. All ways may be closed, but for those people heaven is rent, and God hears their cries of distress. Help shall come from above. At God's command Moses stretched out his staff over the sea, and the sea divided. The waters piled up as walls; the foundations of the earth were uncovered; the divided sea offered a dry way, broad and wide, so that the people could pass through.

But what a dreadful sight! So overwhelming! Who would risk his life here? Risk? No, this was no risky matter for Israel. By faith the people traveled forward, relying upon God's promise and submitting themselves to God's command. "By faith they passed through the Red Sea as by dry land." The Egyptians took a risk; they risked their lives. Faith has a firm foundation in God and His Word, upon which it expects deliverance and cannot be deceived, for faith never fails.

Blessed people who with Israel of old may pass through the Red Sea of Christ's blood and who may be baptized in the cloud and in the Sea. They understand Israel's condition. Also in their journey through life it can seem to be so cut off, so lost, as at Pi-hahiroth. The sea is before them, the mountains at their sides, and the enemies behind. Then they confessed,

*All unprotected, lo, I stand,
No friendly guardian at my hand,
No place of flight or refuge near,
And none to whom my soul is dear.*

—Psalter 387

For God glorifies His grace unto those who are lost. All must be lost and ready to perish in order to obtain eternal redemption by faith in Christ. Alas, if we only had deeper impressions of our lost and condemnable state, salvation in Christ would be more precious

to God's people. Could this not be one of the reasons why there is so much darkness? Why is the song of deliverance so seldom sung among God's people? Often a deep discovery of self is lacking. They do not come to the place where they cry out: "There is no hope." They do not surrender what is of themselves. Oh, that we desired more the discovering and impoverishing ministration of the Holy Spirit! When everything falls away, we obtain our salvation only by faith in Christ, in Him who is the Way, the Truth and the Life. Your soul can never, never forget that time. Passing through the sea as by dry land, oh people of God, how you then could sing! Oh, what a precious time, the love of your espousal, when the King brought you to His banqueting house! The wonder of deliverance is so great that it cannot be fathomed. The enemy is subdued; the curse is removed. Would not the people delivered out of Egypt sing,

*My mouth shall sing for aye
Thy tender mercies, Lord?*

Later, the harps often hang upon the willows. But when God hears from heaven and divides the sea, it is time for His people to sing.

May your grieving souls come to that deliverance. Give yourselves no rest except in the deliverance by the blood and Spirit of Christ. May the Lord open your lips to testify of that redemption, yes, in that deliverance to continually observe the deliverances with which the Lord will still set free. We would close the way to heaven by our sins and unfaithfulness, but Christ keeps it open by His intercession. What a wonder, people of God, that you may be delivered out of all distress and death! Oh, tell forth the praises of Him who hath called you out of darkness into His marvelous light! Tell a poor world what God has become for such a one as you, and what He remains for you. How often He has turned your sorrow into gladness and your sighing into a song of praise. Take courage, persecuted, oppressed, weary souls; take courage. Soon the Lord shall make you free with an eternal deliverance, and cause you to enter into that glory where all tears shall be wiped away from your eyes, and those people loved by God shall sing eternally of redemption in the blood of the Lamb. The passage through the sea is a pledge of the deliverances which Christ works in His own.

But, poor worldlings, strangers of God and His service, what a sad lot is yours! "Which the Egyptians assaying to do were drowned."

Once again Pharaoh hardened his heart; once again the enmity of hell rose up in him. He ventured into the path of God's people. But the Lord greatly alarmed the army of the Egyptians by taking off their chariot wheels so that they drove heavily. Then the Egyptians sought to flee. But, too late! At God's command Moses lifted up his staff over the waters. The walls of water fell down. In

the thundering roar of the seas Pharaoh, his chariots, and his hosts all perished. The judgment had struck.

May it be bound upon our hearts that the Lord still calls to us, "Look unto Me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth." We are traveling to eternity. How shall you fare, enemies of God and His people? You who serve the world, desecrate God's day—football players, sportsmen, pleasure-seekers, how shall you fare when God comes to judge? If you harden your heart, stir up enmity, or threaten death to God's people, God shall soon glorify Himself in your eternal destruction. The gnashing of teeth and your cursing in hell shall eternally exalt the righteousness of Him with whom is terrible majesty.

Oh, to all of you who still miss Christ for your souls, may the Lord give you to profit from this distinction between faith and unbelief, according to His sovereign good pleasure. He has mercy on whom He will have mercy, and whom He will He hardeneth.

CHAPTER XXVIII

The Walls of Jericho

“By faith the walls of Jericho fell down, after they were compassed about seven days.”

—Hebrews 11:30

It is an incomprehensible matter—the taking of Jericho! Men have tried to explain the fall of Jericho’s walls in a natural way. The enmity of man causes him to have no fear of attacking the most holy things. Either the miracles of God are denied, or when the denial cannot be maintained, they try to explain God’s deeds as common, natural things. The strangest suppositions are deemed better “explanations” than what God says in His Word. But all such “explaining” clearly shows just one thing, namely, hatred and bitter enmity against God. The natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God. God has hidden them from the wise and prudent, and revealed them unto babes.

Let it be a serious admonition for us and especially for our rising generation to bow unconditionally under God’s Word.

The Word tells us that by faith the walls of Jericho fell down. In that fall was a miracle of God. For what happened? Israel was encamped in the plains of Jericho, one of the fertile plains of the Jordan. This plain, which required an hour’s travel to traverse either its length or breadth, was of very great importance to Jericho. Jericho was called the city of palm trees because the date palm grew there; there the balsam shrub grew, and many, fragrant roses spread their sweetness. This glorious plain was the gate to Canaan for the Israelites. It was truly a first fruit of the promised land, which could enliven desire for that land.

But Jericho was an unconquerable stronghold; one of those cities of which the spies sent by Moses had rightly declared that they were walled and very great (Numbers 13:28). How could it be otherwise? Jericho was situated on the highway that joined the lands on both sides of the Jordan. Would not they then guard this gate with a strong fortification? It also challenged Israel’s entrance into Canaan. For although the hearts of the people of Canaan

fainted, this did not mean that Jericho intended to surrender without a struggle. The sturdy walls would be able to withstand a long siege. When the gates were locked and barred, no one could go in or out. Did Israel have the arms to batter this fortified city?

But, no, that is not the way it must be done. Neither Joshua nor Israel would have the honor of conquering Jericho. This first conquered city in Canaan shall clearly show that God the Lord is the victor for Israel. He will contend with those that contend with His people. He drafts the plan of action, and by His power the walls of Jericho fall.

Lo, the Captain of the host of the Lord appeared to Joshua. With unshod feet, as Moses at the burning bush, Joshua heard God's plan. God will be the strength of His people, and to Him the praises of His people shall be given. They shall conquer by faith. But that can take place only with the denying of their own strength and wisdom. And it was Joshua's privilege that he might hold his peace and follow the Lord.

God's way is never different, although the circumstances may vary. This is the deep lesson which God teaches His people, to find their salvation in Him alone, a way which can only be trodden by grace. Flesh and blood do not teach this to us. That is why the way is so difficult, and so impossible; it often leads through such depths so that our soul can learn to give itself into the hand of God in order that the Lord may work.

Joshua kept silence, even though all that the Captain of the Lord's host commanded was beyond understanding! Joshua spoke not against that way, but he was entirely submissive. It was past understanding that the walls, the strong walls of Jericho, would fall when the men of war compassed the city, six days, once each day, and the seventh day seven times. But Joshua said nothing and submitted himself, trusting the promise of God: "See, I have given into thine hand Jericho, and the king thereof, and the mighty men of valour." That word was enough, since it was received in faith. Who can describe the power of faith in the promises of God? It is a resting upon God's Word, applied to our soul by His Spirit! It strengthens, delivers, and causes us to be at ease in our greatest needs, in our deepest miseries, in our most dreadful dangers, and in our most indescribable difficulties. It strengthens us in the expectation of deliverance which only the Lord can command. It causes us to sing,

*He hears the needy when they cry,
He saves their souls when death draws nigh,
This God is our salvation.*

According to Joshua's command the people marched forth. First the men of war out of Reuben, Gad, and the half tribe of

Manasseh, the armed men; then the ark, with the seven priests that blew the trumpet, followed by the other men of war out of the tribes of Israel. Silently they marched around the city, day after day, for six days. What a wonderful sight that marching around the city must have been for the inhabitants of Jericho! Perhaps they had lost their fear when nothing else happened in all those days. The wicked sweep away their fear as soon and as far as they can, and do not observe that they are being prepared for destruction.

We know the temporary fear of the world very well. Recall the days of the terrible world war; recall the days of your own oppression or serious illness that brought you near to death. But how long did it last? Did it bring us into true humiliation? Certainly not. Our heart becomes harder, unless God humbles us by His grace. That grace Jericho lacked. It was ripe for judgment.

The seventh day arrived; the army of Israel marched around the city not once, but seven times. The ark remained in the center, it being the token and pledge of the Lord's glory. God went forth with His people. The sound of the trumpet was heard, the same sound that was heard on Sinai and at the feasts of Israel. That trumpet announced the victory of Israel and at the same time, the overthrow of the enemy. Hear the shouting of the people! Before anything was seen when the sound of the trumpet was heard after the city was compassed the seventh time on the seventh day, the people shouted with a great shout. Faith sang the song of victory. Towers, walls, castles, everything collapsed. Nothing remained standing, except the house of Rahab. "The people went up into the city, every man straight before him, and they took the city." The destruction was complete. Not one escaped. All that was in the city was accursed. That completeness lies in the number seven: seven priests who blew the trumpet, seven days, seven times on the seventh day. Is seven not the number that indicates the perfection of divine works, its completion? God finished it. The first of the strong cities was given to Israel as a pledge of the complete destruction of all enemies. By faith the walls of Jericho fell down; they "fell flat," says Joshua 6:20, that is, the walls were broken down to the foundations.

When God is with His people, there is no distress. The ark is no more, nor the priests with trumpets, but God is near His people and gives them clear evidences of it. His grace is upon His people. Would not those people, by that same faith, shout even though the gates are still closed? With my God I can leap over a wall and run through a troop. Yes, the enemy often seems to be strong and powerful and it can be that the violence of the enemy fills God's people with fear and trembling. But the exercises of the presence of the Lord cause us to forget everything of the enemy and every one who is an enemy. In the exercise of faith, God's people may acknowledge with the poet:

*Jehovah is my strength and tower,
He is my happiness and song.*

Before faith no enemy can stand, no fortress is impregnable; faith overcomes the world. Those triumphs of faith are the firstfruits of the complete triumph that is prepared for the people of God.

Oh, people of God, think back on your way. See how often the Lord gave deliverance in times of great distress, and set you at liberty. Should that not encourage and comfort you in the great conflict which continues here below? For as long as God's people remain here on earth, they must battle against the three-headed enemy. In that battle the gates are so often closed, and from all sides is heard, "You will never get in!" But has not the Lord given deliverance time after time? And should not our soul trust in Him who cannot lie? Come, people of God, the trumpet is already blowing; your victory is near. Christ fought that battle in His death, so that by faith in Him you might be the conqueror. His strength was glorified in you when He drew you out of the world and death; when He stripped you of everything to glorify His work; when He delivered you time after time. May your eyes be enlightened to look upon Him. May your soul follow Him in quiet confidence. His victory is complete, and soon He shall make you a partaker of His complete victory. Then no enemy shall distress you any more; then the walls and gates with doors and bars shall never be closed for you again. You shall wear the crown of eternal victory. Oh, may the Lord comfort you with His grace, and grant you a little of that faith which can cast down strong walls and towers, so that your voice may also be heard, as that of Israel, to declare the salvation of the Lord. "This people have I formed for Myself," says the Lord, "and they shall show forth My praise."

CHAPTER XXIX

Rahab

"By faith the harlot Rahab perished not with them that believed not, when she had received the spies with peace."

—Hebrews 11:31

How wonderful it is to find among the heroes of faith such persons as the apostle mentions in Hebrews 11! In the following verses of this chapter you shall read of Samson and Jephthah; in this text Paul mentions Rahab the harlot. Is such a woman among those mentioned? Yes, such a one. So great is the grace of God in Christ Jesus, that no one is too wicked. So free is the sovereignty of God that He takes those who are despised and abominable, and passes by many pious and self-righteous people. "Even so, Father; for so it seemed good in thy sight."

Wonderful indeed! But the wonder becomes still greater if we find our own name in the register of God's elect and favored ones. Yes, this is even a greater wonder than reading of Rahab and Samson, and hearing about others. So great is this wonder that God's people shall find enough in it to praise God and the Lamb throughout all ages of eternity. "But rather rejoice because your names are written in heaven" (Luke 10:20). The Lord desires to reveal this to His people, and causes them to embrace it by faith. No, then they are not surprised that the wicked Rahab may enter in; it is a much greater wonder that I am one of them, such a one as I am, the greatest of sinners who deserves eternal death.

Rahab was a heathen, a stranger of God and of the covenant of promise. Her conversion is a pledge, and belongs to the firstfruits of the great harvest of the conversion of the Gentiles. One day it shall be sung:

*Sons and daughters He shall see,
Born to endless life in Zion.*

As a heathen this woman had sunk deeply into the sin of prostitution. She was a harlot.

Men have tried to cover up her sin by calling her an innkeeper. But no, God's Word does not disguise sin. It draws grace up out of the deepest depths of iniquity. With Tamar and Bathsheba, Rahab

the harlot also received a place in the genealogy of Christ. Some pious, self-righteous people have taken offense at this. A Jesus who bowed so low that He accepted our flesh out of a family that was degraded by harlots—such a Jesus was and is too contemptible for them.

Poor people! They do not know how deeply they have fallen; they do not know their own corrupt hearts. They never fell from the dreadful heights of their rejectable righteousnesses. Grace for lost sinners is a rock of offense to them. May God open our eyes so that we may rightly learn to know ourselves. Surely then we shall not take offense that Rahab was a harlot, however sharply the sin must be deplored and punished.

But why did the spies seek shelter with such a woman? Wasn't her shameful occupation indicated by her house? By going to Rahab's house the two strangers aroused the least attention. Traveling merchants came to Rahab's house every day. Among them, the spies would likely remain unnoticed. Moreover, the house of Rahab was located upon a wall. Perhaps this was the only house that gave opportunity for escape if danger threatened.

In the third place you must observe that the spies were led by the hand of God. The Lord intended something good for this wicked woman. He wanted to glorify His Name in her. For that reason He led the spies to her, for the Lord also guides the means to the salvation of His people. The means come to us or we are brought to the means.

Very soon the arrival of the two Israelites became known. The king of Jericho sent messengers to Rahab. But she had hidden the spies under stalks of flax on the roof of her house. She sent the king's messengers away, saying, "There came men unto me, but I wist not whence they were: and it came to pass about the time of the shutting of the gate, when it was dark, that the men went out: whither the men went I wot not: pursue after them quickly; for ye shall overtake them." And the men pursued after them the way to Jordan. The immediate danger was in this way averted.

But it was a lie. No, we need not conceal it. But all Rahab's sins, including this sin, were atoned for through the faith which God wrought in her by the Holy Spirit, even before the spies came to her. Rahab had heard of the great works of God which He wanted to glorify in Israel, His people. The report had filled the hearts of the heathen with fear, but had opened the eyes of Rahab for the glory of the God of Jacob and of His people. This had touched her heart. Her gods were idols; her people were people condemned to die. As Ruth would one day forsake Moab, in like manner Rahab forsook her people and her idols to choose the side of the people of Jehovah. That is why she hid the spies, risking her life for them. For doubtless if her deed had been discovered, it would have cost

her her life. But she was willing to risk all. She acknowledged that the Lord had given her land to these people. "For the Lord your God, He is God in heaven above, and in the earth beneath." Thus she testified of her faith in the God of Israel. Did Rahab not clearly show her faith in making this choice and in her surrender to the will of the Lord? Are these not signs of true conversion? There is not a regenerated person who is a stranger to this.

Rahab was destined to die. She belonged to the Amorites who had to be utterly destroyed, and were accursed by the Lord. Life was possible for her only in communion with Israel. Thus God persuades His people that they are subject to the judgment of death, and that righteously. Because of their sins and iniquities it is true of them: "Thy father was an Amorite, and thy mother an Hittite."

Oh, how happy these people are regarded by convinced souls who cannot believe that they themselves also belong! Yet they are of that number who are reconciled with God, the saints of the Most High. And more than that, the Lord is God. He alone is worthy that every knee shall bow before Him. The love of God which drew Rahab also constrains all His people to forsake all that is of the world, to surrender all that which by nature they love. "I drew them with cords of a man, with bands of love."

Was that not your choice? Oh, unregenerate of heart, you will be destroyed forever with the world. Jericho with all that was in it, except Rahab and her family, was burned. That is the description of the judgment which rests upon you. May the Lord open your eyes before it is too late. May this become your language: "Thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God."

Rahab never regretted having made that choice.

The spies promised her, her father and mother, her brothers and sisters that their lives would be spared. The line of scarlet thread at her window was a token for her house when Jericho's walls fell. This scarlet line was the pledge given to her. Truly she could show it in faith and rely upon it, although she did so with trembling as she saw the destruction which cast Jericho to the ground.

Is the scarlet line something strange for you, people of God? Certainly not. God gave those signs and pledges of His grace and mercy. May we by faith lift them up and show them, pleading upon them before God.

Yet Rahab received more than this deliverance. She was incorporated into Israel.

With all that had happened, she was still outside of Israel. Hence she was brought outside of the camp. Emphatically it is written: "And they brought out all her kindred, and left them without the camp of Israel." They could not come into the holy camp of the people of the Lord until they had been purified accord-

ing to the law of the Lord. This also was the case with Rahab. She dwelt in the midst of Israel. Indeed, she became the wife of Salmon, the prince, and the mother of Boaz, who was the grandfather of David, out of whose family the Messiah came forth.

May God's people receive instruction from this. A sad complaint is generally made in our day and rightly so, that there is so little breaking-through among God's people. A change took place and with deep impressions, a choice was made. Rahab tarried outside of the camp. But who still considers himself as standing outside? Where is the need of being washed and justified by faith in Christ? Tell me, where do we hear of a spiritual marriage covenant, or of being placed at liberty? Can God's people remain outside of Christ? Are our experiences the ground of our salvation? May the Lord cause us to flee to Him and grant us no rest until we may dwell in the midst of the people of His heritage.

May the Lord encourage and comfort your troubled souls with His sovereign grace. He was willing to freely save the wicked and ungodly Rahab. Will He then turn you away? Come ye who are weary under the burdens of your soul; come, ye who are mourning because of your misery; come ye who are unworthy because of your sins. Here it says that Rahab was saved by faith, and may that also be your experience, but only by grace. Nothing, no, nothing of ourselves can save our souls. That is impossible. How wonderful it was that God looked upon Rahab! And what shall it be when one day you also may enter glory. "All the bells of heaven shall ring, when I enter," said Bunyan. And would you not reiterate that? For God in Christ reconciles the world unto Himself. He saves that which is lost according to His sovereign good pleasure.

CHAPTER XXX

Gideon

"And what shall I more say? for the time would fail me to tell of Gideon."

—Hebrews 11:32

When this time I ask your special attention for Gideon and the other persons mentioned in this text, an observation should precede this explanation of Hebrews 11:32. In verse 32 the apostle changes to another method of dealing with these witnesses of faith. Previously Paul has shown how the faith of those mentioned shone forth in certain acts.

Abel brought a more excellent sacrifice; Enoch had this testimony that he pleased God; Noah prepared the ark; Abraham obeyed—he left Ur and offered up Isaac; Sarah received strength to conceive seed; Isaac and Jacob blessed their sons; Joseph prophesied of the departure of the children of Israel; Moses was hid, and refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter; Israel passed through the Red Sea and by faith conquered Jericho, out of which city Rahab was delivered. Every time the apostle particularly mentioned the *deeds* of each person.

In verse 32, however, Paul departs from this method. He mentions only a few names; in verses 32 to 38 he gathers all the witnesses together. The writer of this epistle mentions the reason for thus briefly summarizing these facts: "The time would fail me." The eye of the apostle was enlightened; he viewed the endless line of those who have conquered by faith. They are innumerable as mentioned in Scripture. To speak of them all lay outside of the scope of the epistle. The time would fail Paul for such individual treatment, and it is not necessary to confirm the apostle's argument. The proofs are already abundant. In all the witnesses discussed, it was clear time and again that by faith God's people are able to endure much sorrow and conquer all opposition. The Hebrews were strengthened by the evidences mentioned in order to run the race set before them. They too shall conquer by steadfast faith. Indeed, God's people shall conquer, no matter how heavy the battle might be. Through all the distressing woes of the world, the

church travels onward to glory with Christ her Head. We cannot mention all the witnesses God has given. Let God's children take courage.

*God shall arise and by His might
Put all His enemies to flight
With shame and consternation.*

Let all conspire together—Satan, the world, and sin—by faith God's people shall nevertheless conquer.

*His people shall triumphant go
Victorious over ev'ry foe.*

Oh, lift up your heads!

Just a little while and you shall triumph eternally. Look at the list of Bible saints, whomever and wherever you wish, each of them is a publisher of it. History speaks of them who were sawn asunder, slain with the sword, and of all the suffering they endured. All of them out of weakness were made strong; they endured, had patience, and became conquerors.

That is the encouraging word of the apostle towards the close of Hebrews 11.

Should we not observe these witnesses more closely? No one will deem it improper if we draw particular attention to each one of the persons mentioned here. Therefore, we will, in short sketches, after this introduction, consider Gideon, the witness of faith which Paul mentioned.

Gideon was a judge. He was called by God to do a work of God, being sustained by the promises of God.

The Midianites robbed God-forgetting Israel. Truly, the days of Gideon were very sad days. Just consider his surroundings. Ophrah, his parental home, lay in the western part of Manasseh, near the border of Ephraim. Baal was served there, and a huge image of Ashtaroth was erected there. The entire region was placed under the protection of the gods of Canaan. Scarcely two centuries before, the Lord had shown Israel the worthlessness of their idols. Remember what happened to Jericho. But Manasseh had forgotten all this. They had forsaken God and sought shelter with the idols of the heathen. The Lord again caused Israel to experience that an idol can do nothing. He delivered His Israel into the hands of the Midianites.

Oh, no, the Midianites did not carry on open war. They spoiled the land. They covered the land of Canaan as grasshoppers for multitude. A worse judgment was hardly possible. No food was left for the people. Israel was very much impoverished. By sacrificing the lives of closest relatives, they were able to keep a little sustenance out of the hands of the robbers. Seven sons of Joash, the father of Gideon, had been taken prisoner and were killed in the headquarters of the Midianites.

Harvest time was at hand. Gideon gathered some wheat and was threshing it, not on the threshing floor, but by the winepress, for he feared the Midianite and the Amalekite, who would soon make their appearance again.

Now it was God's time.

Out of free mercy He turned to His guilty people. He called Gideon to be the deliverer. But Gideon regarded that calling as being almost too heavy. He was the youngest of his father's house, and his family the poorest in Manasseh. Indeed, God's calling is always above human strength, and cannot be accomplished in our own strength. But the Lord wants to be glorified in His own work and by His own strength, and this is made perfect in weakness. Everything we want to do for God is of no value. To receive glory to ourselves is a characteristic of the superficiality of religion of our days with young and old and is to be condemned. The Lord is a jealous God. He does not give His honor to another. When He calls, it is to glorify Himself. Whatever calling, whether in the calling to conversion, or to an office or service in the church, or to whatever work, man must step aside—all honor be to God. For him who is called by God it becomes hopeless and impossible. That is characteristic of the divine calling. He who has not learned to despair of his own strength, does not know the work of God.

Because it is impossible from our side to heed God's calling, our soul is made receptive for God's promise. Therefore, in the calling of Gideon lies the promise of deliverance. "Thou shalt save Israel from the hands of the Midianites." And that promise was confirmed by the signs: first by the fire that rose up out of the rock and consumed the cakes and the flesh, later by the fleece, and finally by the conversation of the enemies about the barley bread. Gideon shall do God's work, but in the strength of the Lord, continually sustained by the deeds of God.

You see, God sustains His work. Again and again He is the strength of His people. He strengthens the faith of His people by which they submit themselves to Him and follow Him, also in the deepest ways. Gideon built an altar unto the Lord and cast down the altar of Baal, and cut down the grove.

With three hundred men he went out to war against the powerful enemy, trembling, but with increasing courage of faith. By night he broke down the symbols of the idols at Ophrah. And God reduced his army to an insignificant number, so that the victory clearly would be of the Lord. Gideon conquered by faith, and delivered Israel from the multitude of oppressors.

Have you knowledge of that faith, reader? That is the true faith of which many prove to be strangers although they boast freely of their great faith. They think they have been delivered from all that sickly "lamenting," but they have never known of it. They will be

zealous for their God and King. They will glory and praise, strive and conquer, so they think. But what does this all mean if we cannot fight the good fight? And that good fight is fought only by the powerless, by the poor and miserable, by those who despair of their own strength and power. If in you it never became a lost case because of all your guilt and sin, all your corruption and iniquity, then the Lord has not glorified His power in you. Flee, my readers, flee away from all that is of self to the strength of the Lord, before your strength shall fail and it shall be forever too late.

The deep lesson Gideon's life teaches us is to walk by faith in the Lord's strength as guilty and powerless sinners. May it be given us out of grace thus to come continually to the Lord and to His fulness. May He sustain us with His Word, and lead us on to victory.

God's people never rise above this lesson. Let Gideon's ephod, which became a snare, be a warning to us. Christ calls, "Come with me from Lebanon." May the Lord keep us in the valleys of insignificance and humility, people of God. If heavy, dark, and grievous ways are often necessary to keep us there, may we also learn to love those ways and take pleasure in sicknesses, weaknesses, and distresses, in order that the power of Christ may be glorified in us.

CHAPTER XXXI

Barak

To tell of . . . Barak."

—Hebrews 11:32

The apostle did not follow the chronological order. It was not Paul's intention to name the heroes of faith one by one. He could not present all of them to the Hebrews. He just took a handful. And taking a few out of the many caused him to name the witnesses without any regard to chronological order. Jephthah judged before Samson, although Paul mentioned Samson first. Barak also preceded Gideon. But be it said again, this does not in the least minimize the apostle's argument; on the contrary, it makes you feel that out of the rich abundance of the witnesses of faith Paul picks but a few. The 'grace of God, glorified in His people, cannot be contained. It is ever new, ever different, and yet always working for the glorification of His Name in the salvation of His own. Each of God's children is led along his own way which is decreed by God. But all these ways are one in the exercise of true, saving faith, which is the substance of things hoped for and the evidence of things not seen. That is why those people can understand each other.

*Although they came from lands afar,
Their hearts did melt in one.*

It is sad what the book of Judges tells of the children of Israel after the death of Ehud. They again did evil in the sight of the Lord. Will those people never learn? Because of their intermingling with the Canaanites and their serving of Baal, the Lord sold His Israel into the hand of the king of Mesopotamia. When they cried out in distress, Jehovah delivered them by Othniel.

Forty years later the people fell into the same evil. Eglon was the rod in God's hand to humble His people, and Ehud was the means used for deliverance. And the land had rest eighty years. After Ehud came Shamgar, the son of Anath who slew of the Philistines six hundred men with an ox goad, and he also delivered Israel.

But there was no forsaking of sin. It seems as if the deliverance by Shamgar brought about no change. God's Word, in describing

the falling away, goes back to Ehud, and it says that after the death of this deliverer Israel continued to do evil in the sight of the Lord.

True conversion was lacking. By heavy oppression and hard blows, the people had to be made to cease from bowing their knees before idols; but their hearts lacked the renewal that would cause them to walk gladly in the ways of the Lord, to serve Him alone with all their hearts. Therefore they sank back into the same evil, not once, but repeatedly, as soon as they thought they could do without God. They have hewed them out cisterns, broken cisterns that can hold no water.

That want of the true renewal of the heart always bears bitter fruit, both for a nation in general, and for every person in particular. Can a shell of religion truly bring us to God and to His commandments? Just look at our nation, the Netherlands.* From times of old the Lord has magnified His Name in the history of our country. Is there a nation which can boast of God's deeds as our nation can? But which nation has sunk as low as ours? And where is true conversion, the returning to the God of gods? It is true, we have churches and schools, but there are many more churches with a false religion, image worship, and idolatry than those that give God the honor due Him. We have churches and schools . . . but was there ever a time when God's commandments were trodden under foot more than in these days? Our nation is sinking away in sin. It is dancing, yes, even leaping toward its own destruction. Neither blessings nor adversities withhold the people from the steep decline on which they are running away from the living God with an ever increasing speed. Israel is an image of our nation: it continued to do that which was evil in the sight of the Lord.

No deceitful artifice helps; nor do "Christian" policies that leave everyone free to serve God or not to serve Him, to honor the idols or to honor the only true God. No, such political practice leaves the people over to their own hearts' lusts and will lead them to destruction. Oh, may the Lord pour out His Spirit upon us, that we may return to Him, and bow before Him alone! He is a God jealous of His honor and is angry with those who rob Him of His honor.

But is it also thus with you and me personally? If true conversion is lacking, even though there may be some external change, it is only temporary. That is why the world has so much power in the church these days. The work in the heart is lacking. More and more people withdraw themselves from the power of the truth. The Christian lifestyle, as it is called, has become conformed to the world. How

* Though this statement and the remainder of this paragraph, as well as the next paragraph, largely refer to the Netherlands, most of Rev. Kersten's comments apply equally well to our North American scene. Ed.

can it be otherwise? Men may presume regeneration, but the unrenewed hearts of the "presumed" citizens of heaven remain slaves of sin. Their imaginations are only evil from their youth. According as the power of the truth is taken away from the conscience, it becomes evident: "the children of Israel again did evil in the sight of the Lord." I pray you, do not be satisfied with your superficial religion. We must be born again; we must receive not only *another* heart, but a *new* heart. They are a poor people who are strangers of this! One day their ground shall fall away. God looks upon the heart. And our heart is a filthy fountain of iniquity by nature. Only the blood and Spirit of Christ are able to renew it. Let Israel's history cause us to understand that anything less than that renewing cannot save us from sin, nor from the dreadful judgment of God.

Alas, the people of God must surely see their picture in Israel. Sin does not cease. The flesh lusteth against the spirit, and that warfare does not end until death. In this life the struggle with sin continues, and evil often overpowers us. Who could ever realize that the way to heaven would be as the people of God learn to know it? Even the sins of our youth haunt us and again we must seek strength. This caused David to cry out, "Remember not the sins of my youth." If God's grace were not always the same and ever renewed, it would be a lost case for all God's people. But in grace lies deliverance. God never becomes weary of bestowing grace upon guilty sinners. He who made His blessings for Israel so unutterably great, who sent His people out of Egypt and glorified His wonders forty years in the wilderness, who broke down Canaan's strongholds and destroyed its nations to give the promised land to His people—delivers out of the depths of misery. And that God is forgotten and denied by Jacob's seed! His own people do that which is evil in His sight.

How it should continually humble us to the depths and cause us to be ashamed that our hearts are so corrupt! How indispensable, therefore, are the chastisements of God for those who fear God! The rod together with bitter adversities must serve to make His adulterous people return to Him. The price of sin is so high and must be bemoaned so bitterly.

First, it was an enemy from afar; then, it was an enemy nearby; now, an enemy that had remained in Canaan by which God chastised His people. May it teach us to fear sin more and more. Jabin had violently oppressed God's Israel for twenty years. There was not a spear for deliverance or a shield for protection any more. The suffering became unbearable. It must come to that point. The people maintained their position until then, but then they cried unto the Lord. Yes, until then—God was their last resort. With shame we must admit, not just once, but again and again God's people hold out to the end, until God Himself breaks their heart. It

is *His* work. He is the First and the Last. Through Him alone shall His people return to Him, in order that He shall deliver them and again unite them to Himself. This He did by Barak.

Barak was from Kedesh-Naphtali, out of the tribe that was most severely oppressed by Sisera. By Deborah, the prophetess, the Word of the Lord was brought to Barak that with ten thousand men he would defeat Sisera at the river of Kishon.

This was an impossible demand made upon Barak. Sisera had nine hundred chariots of iron. What could the small infantry of Barak do? Moreover, must he with his soldiers climb Mount Tabor and allow themselves to be entirely surrounded on that mount? Truly the Lord does wonders, but always through human impossibilities. Thus the deliverance of *His* people shall always be His work. God drove the army of Sisera into the valley of the plain. Horses, chariots, and horsemen were discomfited in the swollen waters of the Kishon. The Lord is God! He who slew Pharaoh and his horsemen in the Red Sea also destroyed the Canaanites in the Kishon River. Barak believed! Certainly, otherwise he could not have gone out to battle; he would not have dared to venture into battle. His little army was powerless against the powerful Canaanites. Nevertheless, the sins of the people called for vengeance. By faith, Barak could embrace the grace of God and find atonement for their guilt; by faith, he accepted the calling of God; by faith, he did not fear the very strong army. And why then did he desire Deborah to go with him to battle? Because Deborah was a prophetess; out of her mouth he would hear the Word of the Lord and the men, inspired by her word, would dare to enter the battle.

A woman would slay the enemy's captain, not he. God's calling should have been enough for Barak. But although Barak sought support in Deborah, it was faith that caused him to fight the battle unto victory.

May God teach us to fight that battle if we are still strangers of it. But may the Lord also grant that our faith may be in exercise continually. May He bring down the "Canaanites" which remain in our hearts. May He crush them with all their hosts. By faith may He grant us to become more than conquerors in Him. Those "Canaanites" can oppress us violently, but they shall not always have dominion over us. True faith will subdue them, and one day God's people shall reign over them and God shall cast them off forever. We pray that the unchangeable and faithful Jehovah will incline our hearts to His commandments, and make it an ever greater wonder for us that our unfaithfulness does not put His faithfulness to naught.

By grace, yes, by grace alone, God's people shall be saved to praise and glorify Him, the only triune God, forever and ever.

CHAPTER XXXII

Samson

"To tell of . . . Samson."

—Hebrews 11:32

Tell of Samson?

Must we also reckon Samson to be counted among the heroes of faith? It is becoming more and more amazing. Yes, indeed, the grace of God becomes even greater when contrasted with the deepening manifestation of sin.

Alas—Samson was guilty of serious sins in his lifetime. Sinful love for one of the daughters of the Philistines filled his heart. He desired a woman of Timnath for himself. This was against God's commandment (Josh. 23:12,13).

And still "it was of the Lord." Through the depths of sin God desires to execute His counsel. Yet, the fact remains that this personal contact of Samson with the Philistines was not permitted according to God's command. We cannot understand how the Lord, who governs sin—although the holy and righteous One is far from wickedness—should in this way place Samson over against the Philistines.

Thirty Philistines of Ashkelon were slain. Their garments were the reward for those who declared the riddle.

As Gideon took three hundred men to war, so also Samson took three hundred foxes, which he tied tail to tail in pairs with a fire brand between them, and sent them into the cornfields of the enemy.

Faithlessly, they had given his wife to another. The woman and her father were burned with fire by the Philistines. Thus God prevented the union of Samson with the enemies of His people.

But Samson went in unto another woman of the Philistines, a harlot at Gaza! Can a Nazarite of God sink any deeper? Is there a more abominable sin than lust? Here also Samson walked away as a conqueror. He carried the gates of Gaza to the top of the hill that was before Hebron.

Samson loved a woman in the valley of Sorek, whose name was Delilah. The lap of Delilah became his downfall. He sold himself into her hands, although he knew of her treacherous design, having experienced it three times. This woman dese-

crated his vow as a Nazarite. The Philistines triumph!

Take an overall view of Samson's life. Is there one word to defend such actions? Not a word! God does not approve of sin, not even in His own people, not even in Samson. God's testimony teaches us how severely the Lord chastises the sins of His people. Shall not all God's children bemoan their sins and backslidings with bitter tears?

But this does not place them outside of grace. Do not reject Samson, for God has not rejected him.

But what about Samson's death? His death was most certainly not suicide. His death was an offering of his life for the cause of God and for the deliverance of Israel. His death was an act of faith. His death was a type of the death of Christ.

Again, we must condemn sin because God hates sin. Oh, that we might rightly hate and flee from it! But let us consider that Samson was a favorite of God, a conqueror by faith. God saved him from the depths of perdition. Samson also experienced the bitter fruits of his sin and bemoaned it bitterly. It is by grace alone that all God's people are saved. Grace is the antithesis of sin in which we are all sunk by nature, even the best, not one excepted. We cannot imagine redemption from the state of misery for anyone without the grace of God in Christ. No, that is not possible. And was not that grace sufficiently abundant to expiate all Samson's sins? Oh, readers, be not too much offended with the faults and sins of God's people, but seek the grace which God desires to give you.

It pleased the Lord to glorify Himself in Samson in a very special manner. His special birth, his warfare, and his death are evidences of this. An angel announced the birth of Samson. Moreover, this messenger of heaven gave a very lofty description of the promised son to the mother and later also to Manoah. Samson would be a Nazarite from his mother's womb; he would begin to deliver Israel out of the hand of the Philistines. In the institution of the Nazarites, the priesthood of Israel still blossomed. Once all Israel was a priestly nation. But at Sinai they forfeited their privilege of executing the priestly office, and the execution of it was laid upon Aaron's family. One day, with the new dispensation, this Aaronic priesthood would fall away again, and the people who partake of Christ's anointing shall be priests of the Lord. The Nazarite was a type of that priesthood.

The Nazarites were subject to the laws of the priests. Indeed, the demands made of them exceeded those made of the priests. For the priest was not permitted to drink wine or strong drink when he entered the sanctuary. The Nazarite, however, had to always refrain from drinking any product of the vine, "from the kernels even to the husk" (Num. 6:4). The law for the Nazarite was even stricter than that for the priest.

So it was also with being forbidden to shave. No priest was allowed to shave the corner of his beard, but for the Nazarite it was written that no razor should go over his head. He was required to let the locks of his hair grow. In the third place, the priest might not defile himself over a dead person, unless he was very closely related. The Nazarite, however, should in no event come near a dead body. He was like the high priest who "shall not defile himself for his father nor for his mother."

Samson was born a Nazarite. A man could become a Nazarite for a longer or shorter period by taking a vow. Numbers 6 speaks of that very clearly. But Samson differed from them all because he was born a Nazarite. In this Samson was already a type of the Lord Jesus, a High Priest after the order of Melchizedek who was not of the tribe of Levi. Christ Jesus alone, by His sacrifice, brought in an everlasting righteousness. He alone is Priest forever. The priesthood of Aaron pointed to Him. All the sacrifices symbolized Him. In Him the institution of the Nazarite was fulfilled. He is the separated, the sanctified One of the Father, sent into the world to save His elect.

Without Jesus Christ there is no salvation. Everyone who misses Him, misses all. However much of our own righteousness we may try to bring together, if we remain outside of Christ, all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags. If we lack the one experience of Christ being the ground of our salvation, we are building on a sandy foundation which shall one day fall away, regardless of how many experiences we may think we have.

How serious our admonitions should be against this misleading evil, especially in our days when so many with an imaginary heaven are traveling on their way to hell! How many will think to enter in, but shall not be able! The Lord has emphatically and repeatedly warned against this. Just remember, my readers, what the Lord spoke in Matthew 7:22,23, "Many will say to Me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Thy Name? . . . and in Thy Name done many wonderful works? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me ye that work iniquity."

Oh, listen, you who are baptized, professors of the truth, zealous for the church, prophesiers in the Name of the Lord who have no more than all this, your lot is described here; your life is depicted here; your sentence is pronounced here. Christ calls all those who are outside of Him workers of iniquity. He shall cast you away into everlasting fire.

What then are you lacking? You are not Nazarites; you are not sanctified; you are not separated in Christ. Grace has not drawn a line of demarcation between you and the world. You have not learned to know yourself as a sinner. You have never lost your life in order to find it, no, never. If you had and if this had truly

happened in your life, you would conduct yourself as a miserable sinner, making supplication to your Judge. But the religious spirit of the times is estranged from this. They hate the life of a poor sinner and they express it openly. "Jesus accepts sinners" is their maxim, although they never learned to know themselves as sinners. Oh, my friends, shun a doctrine that does not place you with your sins and miseries before God's unimpeachable justice; flee from a doctrine that does not condemn you as utterly lost, so that salvation in Christ alone be opened for you. Flee, yes, flee from sin, but also from your own virtues and righteousnesses, before the door of grace is closed upon you forever.

The children of the Lord become Nazarites. God separates them. He draws them out of the world. He causes them to die to self. He works in them the choice never to be repented of—to walk on the narrow path of life—and gives them the strength to persevere to the end, although they often stumble and fall. That was also evident in Samson's life. May it encourage and comfort you. Oh, testify with the poet:

*His suff'ring one He has not spurned,
Who unto Him for succor turned.*

But, on the other hand, may the Lord cause us always to fear sin. How bitterly God's people must bewail their sins! God gives His children promises for this life and the life to come, but they often allow Delilah to cut their hair. Then with their eyes put out they find themselves in prison. Oh, people of the Lord, may we by grace hate sin and flee from it more and more, otherwise the Philistines shall be upon us with all their cruelty, as upon Samson. May love for the Name and for the honor of God incite us to walk as Nazarites in tender fear, separated unto God. Mortify your members here on earth, pull out your eyes, and by grace cut off your feet so that you may walk freely in the kingdom of heaven. God set you apart. In His sovereign good pleasure God the Father wrote your name in the book of life; God the Son bought you with His precious blood; God the Holy Spirit plucked you as a brand out of the fire. You are set apart unto God; you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a peculiar people. Oh, that you may show forth the praises of Him who hath called you out of darkness into His marvelous light—you who in times past were not a people, but are now the people of God—you who had not obtained mercy, but now have received mercy. Dearly beloved, remember the apostle's admonishment, "I beseech you as strangers and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts, which war against the soul; having your conversation honest among the Gentiles: that, whereas they speak evil against you as evildoers, they may by your good works, which they shall behold, glorify God in the day of visitation" (1 Peter 2:11,12).

Notwithstanding that the life of Samson passed through deep ways of sin, as we mentioned in the first part of our meditation, that did not change the fact that he, by faith, did *begin* to deliver Israel. He was the avenger for his people upon the enemies in a time when the falling away from the living God was prevalent, and the humiliation of Israel was so great that all courage was gone. Then God raised up and sanctified Samson. In this respect, the announcement of Samson's birth by the angel and his obligation to be a Nazarite have much significance. No deliverer was to be found among the tribes of Israel. There was no Barak, no Gideon, not even a Jephthah. There was no helper. Then God Himself arose for His people, even though they had scorned Him. The Lord raised up a judge! Was not Samson a type of Christ? There was no one to help. There was no deliverer for God's elect, neither in heaven, nor on earth. There was none! "For who is He that engaged his heart to approach unto Me?" Oh, raise your eyes on high, people of God! It is for you that God the Father ordained a Deliverer, that the Son gave Himself to be Surety for you who had subjected yourself to eternal death. Your Redeemer was given of God, by the sovereign love of the Father, which love is so great that He gave His only-begotten Son. The redemption of poor sinners is the work of God alone. Not a penny can man pay to satisfy God's justice. Heaven and earth together are not sufficient to save even one child of Adam. The people of God are reconciled *with God by God*.

How clearly this is foreshadowed in Samson—not only by God's raising him up when the tribes of Israel did not produce a deliverer, but even more in the fact that men denied the judge whom God had given.

We notice nothing encouraging of all Israel. Indeed we do notice something, but only for evil! They rejected the deliverer. Was there a praying to be delivered out of the hands of the Philistines? No, not even a weeping as formerly at Bochim, nor a conversion to God as in the days when Jephthah was called; there was not even a crying to be delivered out of their misery. Israel was a prey of the enemy, and it submitted ignominiously. Even Judah, the lion of the tribes, was silent. All hope of deliverance was lost. The Philistines had their garrisons throughout the whole land. The Israelites were disarmed. There was not even a smith in Israel. And what was infinitely worse, the people seemed paralyzed. They did not even desire to try to offer resistance any more. Where was the hope upon God's promises, the humbling of themselves under the mighty hand of God that He might exalt them in due time? There was nothing of this.

Notwithstanding, God arose and gave a deliverer, and they left Samson alone to fight against the Philistines. Indeed, they did even worse than that! The Philistines encamped against Judah

and demanded that they surrender Samson to them! Did Judah now see that the hour of deliverance had come? Would Judah wake up? No, oh, no! Judah allowed itself to be used as a slave to do the will of the Philistines. What? Shall the royal tribe, which formerly marched at the head of all the tribes, now bind and surrender its deliverer? Yes, indeed! Judah had sunk so deeply!

No man arose to follow Samson to war—not one. But now three thousand came forward to deliver Samson to the Philistines. Judah rejected the deliverer whom God had raised! Cry out to their shame! A thousand times “Shame!” We must despise those people who became a doormat for the Philistines! But . . . may the Lord open our eyes! Remember: *we* are the rejectors of the Deliverer; *we* are the betrayers.

God calls to save us from Satan. He raises His voice in the top of high places, by the way of our paths. But who listens? Who lays hold on the deliverance offered? No one.

God’s people are saved from death by a *rejected* Deliverer. He came to His own and His own received Him not. A rejected Messiah, nailed to the cursed tree, is the Author of salvation.

Who bows before Him? Do we not all turn away from the cross which is a stumbling block to the Jews and foolishness to the Greeks? Salvation through the crucified One by grace alone—such a salvation is contrary to flesh and blood. Ye will not come to Me that ye might have life. As Judah rejected Samson, so in deep enmity we reject Christ. Oh, that our eyes might be opened! Our hearts burn with enmity, even though we possibly honor Jesus with our mouths. We stumble at Christ, to our destruction. Yes, even God’s people must experience what an opposition there is in their souls against the way of free grace. What a discovering and impoverishing work of the Holy Spirit those people need in order to rest only in the Redeemer given by God! How indispensable unto the very end is the work of the Holy Spirit to cause us to live out of Him! But then it is also a great wonder that this Redeemer redeems those who reject Him, those who, as God’s people learn to know themselves, seek to rob Christ of His crown and glory. For them He pleaded their cause, as Samson did for Judah that had bound him.

How remarkably is Christ’s victory typified in Samson when he carried away the gates of Gaza! Samson was compassed about to be put to death. The gates were locked; the streets were watched. There was no escape. Samson was a prisoner as in a barred cage. But in the night he arose. He seized the doors of the gates of the city and the two posts, and took them, bar and all, put them upon his shoulders, and carried them up to the top of the hill that is before Hebron.

Does not this escape from death in a locked city point to the

Christ who could not be holden by death? Samson was a type of the true Redeemer, of Him who swallowed up death in victory. He entered the fortification of Satan; He descended unto death so that through death He might destroy him who had the power of death, that is, the devil. As Samson in His death killed more enemies than in his lifetime, so the death of Christ was the total defeat of all His enemies. Of Him the church sings:

*O Lord, Thou hast ascended
On high in might to reign;
Captivity Thou leadest
A captive in Thy train.*

The story of Samson points to that victory, to that Judge and Deliverer in whom alone there is salvation for those who are entirely lost. He, and He alone, is the Savior. He saves from the bands of death and snatches out of the jaws of destruction. No other Name under heaven is given among men by which we must be saved. And that Name is enough. He trampled upon Satan's head and took away the gates of death to deliver His people. Here already they are snatched from death by the victory which Christ won. He calls them out of the grave as He once called Lazarus. He saves them out of all their distresses, and that continually, and one day, through death, He will cause the people whom He has bought with His blood to enter into heaven for their eternal victory. There is no other way to salvation. No other redemption is possible.

Oh, let us prove ourselves whether that conquering Jesus has wrought the work of His grace also in us. Has He also called us when we were still enemies? Do we know something of the fact that His victory over death caused us to rise out of death?

Can anyone do without the vital strength of Christ? Without Him we are certainly going to eternal perdition, where we shall eternally bemoan our sin. No virtue, no profession, no praising of Jesus, no tears, no verses—nothing, nothing can save us but Christ alone. And that we do not want. Not one person desires it. We want to go to heaven, but not by way of the crucified One. If we think otherwise; if we think we esteem Jesus highly, it is only our blindness; we do not know our own heart. May the Lord open our eyes, so that we, as utterly lost, may seek our salvation in Him. What a great wonder it would become for us! He redeems those who reject Him, for His own people crucified Him. Their sins called for His death. They withstood Him as long as they could. God's people persevered in spite of all admonitions, all pricks of conscience, all callings, as long as possible. They did not desire to bow the knee.

But the Lord prevailed. Then it was finished! He took the gates and the posts of Gaza. He broke the doors of iron and the bars of brass. What a wonder of grace! It was His work, the work of Him who reconciles *enemies* with God.

Come, ye who are bound in heart, locked up in Gaza, prisoners in the chains of Satan and sin, hardened of heart, look unto Him who is greater than Samson. He not only *begins* to deliver, but He has brought about a *complete* deliverance, and shall deliver unto the end.

Does unbelief keep your soul prisoner? There is counsel with Him. Do you doubt whether the work in you is a true work? Whether you are a partaker of Him and His righteousness? May He cause the light of redemption to arise for you and deliver your soul. May He confirm you by faith.

If your path leads through many dark ways and hidings of God's face, through oppressions and adversities, oh, may your eye be upon Him. He takes away the gates of Gaza when he turns your sorrow into gladness on the morrow. His face shall shine upon you. His grace shall enrich you with its comfort.

Come, people of God—oh, lift your heads! Your battle is ended. In His death Christ has conquered all enemies. Soon the way shall be at an end. Yet a little while and the gates of the heavenly city whose Builder and Maker is God will be opened for you. There no enemy shall vex you and you shall be eternally free from all your bondage, to honor God and the Lamb perfectly.

*The glorious gates of righteousness
Throw open unto me,
And I will enter them with praise,
O Lord, my God to Thee.*

May the conquering Immanuel, the greater Samson, cause us to continually experience His strength for deliverance out of all the bands of death, so that we may glorify His Name and may rejoice more and more in the wonder of free grace. He came to reconcile enemies to God. We shall be saved as enemies, but then we will give Him the honor, who has fought the battle alone.

A greater than Samson is here!

CHAPTER XXXIII

Jephthah

"To tell of . . . Jephthah."

—Hebrews 11:32

"And the children of Israel did evil again in the sight of the Lord, and served Baalim, and Ashtaroth, and the gods of Syria, and the gods of Zidon, and the gods of Moab, and the gods of the children of Ammon, and the gods of the Philistines, and forsook the Lord, and served not Him."

In these words of Judges 10:6 the sad condition of Israel in the days that preceded the deliverance of Jephthah is depicted. Serving the gods of the heathens roundabout goes hand in hand with forsaking the one, true God. How can it be otherwise? It is indeed the universal doctrine of our day, "to each his own!" But the Lord demands a peculiar place in the nation, in the church, in our homes and hearts. He alone is God, and He despises and condemns all idolatry. He especially demanded of Israel that they would acknowledge Him alone as God. But the people had sunk deeper than the heathens. For which people changed their idols as often as the Israelites did? The degeneration of the best is the most contemptible. The degeneration of a people to whom the Lord has revealed Himself in a special manner is indescribable. Our nation should heed this warning. Who knows, it might lead to some conversions! Israel had the privilege of returning to the God of their fathers with sorrow and repentance, but this came about only through the deep way of God's wrath. "And the anger of the Lord was hot against Israel, and He sold them into the hands of the Philistines, and into the hands of the children of Ammon." The oppression from both of these enemies was so severe that Israel was "sore distressed." In their distress the children of Israel then cried unto the Lord and said, "We have sinned against Thee." This confession was more than a superficial realization that something was not in order. It was the fruit of a true knowledge of sin; for Israel itself expressed it, "We have sinned against Thee, both because we have forsaken our God, and also served Baalim." The discovery of sin works in us a sure and clear consciousness of the evil committed. In this a true returning to the Lord is distinguished from a conviction

of conscience. Conscience convictions lack true humility, since it does not teach us to know sin as sin. In order to seek refuge in God as a guilty sinner, a true and clear knowledge of sin is essential.

This was true of Israel as a nation in general. It is true of every nation. It is also true of our nation which has sunk so deeply into sin, and that threatens more and more to fall into the hands of Rome and a possible revolution. The old enemies may again gain dominion, and already are causing oppression to be felt and that in a land that God had once lifted up by the display of His great wonders. This land also has refused to serve the one true God any longer and bows before the gods of these frivolous times. No Christendom of "to each his own" is able to stop the people in their downward course to destruction. No alliance can give us the weapons we need; instead, coalition with the enemy becomes a disaster. It weakens us as Reformed people and draws us further and further away from maintaining our principles. God's Name and His day are trodden under foot. God is excluded by the people of our nation and is utterly neglected. Romish idolatry, which angered our fathers, becomes more and more brazen, and we endure it without protesting. No holy fervor and zeal fill our hearts; we feel no pain or sorrow. Men seek tolerance for those who have no concern for the honor of God. Oh, may God awaken us! May He discover our sins to us, and cause us to see them as they are! May His Spirit convince us of them. Then certainly we would cry out with Israel, "We have sinned against Thee, both because we have forsaken Thee, and also served Baalim." In that confession a way would be opened to heal the breach that has been made. Oh, citizens and rulers, fall upon your knees before God! May a true confession be made before it is too late. Whatever *men* devise will remain fruitless. Only one way leads to salvation—we must return to God! Away with the weak, half-hearted coalition politics, away with covering up misery and conforming to the world. The honor and justice of God cry out! May we learn to bow down in the dust.

Each sinner needs discovery of his sin and iniquity. We have offended God by our sins, and we must learn to know by the operation of the Holy Spirit how great our sins and miseries are, else the grace of reconciliation will never be our portion. Is there any truth that is more readily admitted, and yet less experienced than this truth? One of the causes of the darkness and deadness of the church of God lies in the lack of true knowledge of sin. To some extent the doctrine of misery is ridiculed because many think that knowledge of our misery is unnecessary. They say, "Are we not all in the covenant? We have not served the world wickedly. Why then do we need that deep knowledge of misery?" Paul, as the pious Pharisee, had to learn to know himself as the greatest of sinners. Certainly, Satan could not make more headway in misleading

souls in any other way than by denying the necessity of the true knowledge of misery. Many walk to hell blindfolded, expecting to arrive in heaven.

But there is more. Among God's people we find less and less of that deep uncovering, that self-knowledge, that being lost outside of Christ. The damage thus done is unspeakably great. God does not receive the honor due Him. There is almost no room for Christ. One thing is lacking, namely, much of the deep, true knowledge of sin.

See how God desires to bring His people to that place. He causes Israel to feel the bitterness of the way which they have trodden. God does not cast away His people who confess their guilt. And there is not a plastering with untempered mortar in God's dealing with His people. "Go and cry unto the gods which ye have chosen; let them deliver you in the time of your tribulation." That is what God said in order to humble His people more deeply. They must give themselves completely into the hand of God. Away with idolatry! To God whom they have forsaken, hewing themselves out cisterns, broken cisterns that hold no water; to Him alone Israel must return and fall into His hands and acknowledge His justice.

"We have sinned" is Israel's humble answer, "do thou unto us whatever seemeth good unto Thee; deliver us only, we pray Thee, this day" (Judges 10:15). It was enough. Then God's soul was grieved for the misery of Israel.

Have you ever experienced a casting off by God? His being angry with you? That righteous reprimand for all your iniquities? That turning you away as the Lord Jesus did to the Canaanitish woman? Why? So that by faith alone you may learn to know that all is in Him. You must fall—fall to the side of God's justice. Justice must be glorified in us. It will cause us to cast away all our idols. It will be guilt, *our own guilt*, that we bemoan. "They shall come with weeping, and with supplications will I lead them: I will cause them to walk by the rivers of waters in a straight way, wherein they shall not stumble." Is God not just, even if He should give us over to ourselves forever? And still His guilty people cannot do without Him. It causes them to fall at His feet and cry out with Israel, "Do Thou unto us whatsoever seemeth good unto Thee," and at the same time beg for deliverance. That deliverance the Lord had already prepared in Jephthah, although Israel was unaware of it.

Jephthah was not born of a legitimate marriage; he was the son of a harlot. For that reason he had been thrust out by his brethren. But this stone, rejected by the builders, became the head of the corner. He, the son of the tribal head, Gilead, wandered at the head of a band in the land of Tob. There God taught his fingers to fight, as in later days David was taught when he was at the head of six hundred men who had gathered themselves unto him. This Jephthah, thrust out by his brethren, was one of the heroes of faith,

says Paul. He was a type of Christ, the rejected One who alone delivers His people. Jephthah acted in the fear of the Lord. The covenant with the elders of Israel was confirmed before the Lord in Mizpeh. According to God's law in Deuteronomy he did not immediately attack Ammon, but he first showed Israel's right against the injustice committed by Ammon. Finally, the childlike fear of Jephthah was seen in the vow he made — "If thou shalt without fail deliver the children of Ammon into mine hands, then it shall be, that whatsoever cometh forth of the doors of my house to meet me, when I return in peace from the children of Ammon, shall surely be the Lord's, and I will offer it up for a burnt offering" (Judg. 11:30, 31). We know that the one who met Jephthah was his daughter, his only child. Had Jephthah thought of her when he made his vow, or not? But who else would come out of his house to meet him besides her? The words of this vow did not apply to an animal that could have been offered to the Lord. Neither could a servant be offered to the Lord, for all human sacrifice was an abomination to Jehovah. Jephthah gave himself and his family into the hand of the Lord. He was a rejected one. Would God have mercy on him and his family? Would the Lord give his family a place among the tribes of Israel? The decision was up to Jehovah. Jephthah yielded himself into God's hand.

Jephthah's daughter was the one who came to meet him with timbrels and with dances. Jephthah was much stirred. The Lord had decided. She was the Lord's burnt offering, but not upon the altar. God had formerly destroyed the nations of Canaan because of their human sacrifices. But Jephthah sacrificed her in this sense that he gave his only child entirely to the Lord. He, an outcast, had to bow before the deeds of God. His family was given no place in Israel. Although he was a bastard, he had been called to be the tribal head, but according to God's law he stood outside of the congregation of the Lord. His family would die out. Jephthah did to his daughter according to the vow he had made, and she knew no man. She lived out her days in loneliness, lamented yearly by the daughters of Israel, who also went to mourn for her. But she also was enabled to give herself into God's hand. Also for her God's work was honorable and glorious. To Jephthah it was fulfilled: "Neither let the son of the stranger, that hath joined himself to the Lord, speak, saying, The Lord hath utterly separated me from His people: neither let the eunuch say, Behold, I am a dry tree. For thus saith the Lord unto the eunuchs that keep my sabbaths, and choose the things that please Me, and take hold of My covenant; even unto them will I give in Mine house and within My walls a place and a name better than of sons and of daughters: I will give them an everlasting name, that shall not be cut off" (Isa. 56:3-5).

Jephthah, the illegitimate one, whose family died out in Is-

rael, had his name written in the register of the never-dying heroes of faith!

Oh, you who are cast out, can you see the dealings of God in grace? Where grace falls, it falls freely. There is a place for outcasts better than of sons and daughters.

Finally, Jephthah executed God's judgment to the humbling of Ephraim. Only six years Jephthah judged Israel, and in that short time Ephraim came against him to war. In their pride, the tribe of Ephraim felt itself to be greater and stronger than Manasseh. Ephraim begrudged Jephthah the victory, and wanted to burn him and his house with fire. In the fearful civil war which followed forty-two thousand men of Ephraim died. *God's* judgment broke the pride of Ephraim, and Jephthah was the *means* which God used. For Jephthah there was strife to the very last.

Well then, people of God, if the proud Ephraimites exalt themselves in our hearts, if they desire to take the throne, may we be given to fight for their humiliation. God is jealous of His honor. Oh, may we die daily in order that the Lord may be glorified! Eyes must be plucked out, hands and feet cut off, and brethren slain in the warfare between flesh and spirit which continues here in this life. May the Lord conquer our hearts so that in Him we shall be more than conquerors. He who shall strive to the end, yes, to the end, shall be saved.

CHAPTER XXXIV

David

"To tell of . . . David."

—Hebrews 11:32

Yes, David was a hero of faith.

But only by grace!

Actually this is not a contrast because faith can glory in nothing but grace. "God forbid that I should glory," said Paul, "save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ." But we so often have misconceptions of the work of God and the life of His people. Heroes, to us, are the great, the famous people. Heroes of faith, however, are those who are little in themselves, entirely lost and miserable.

How evident that was in the life of David. No, it was not to *his* honor, but that the grace of God might be the more magnified in him. God does not approve of sin for He hates and punishes sin, also in His own. And David had to bear the bitter fruit of his iniquity.

Not only did his soul experience the sad hiding of God's face during the time that he did not heartily acknowledge his iniquity with Bathsheba, but the Lord showed in the severe chastisement after his sin was forgiven that He does not allow sin to go unpunished. The sword was placed over David's house—and his wives were taken by others. And who can describe David's grief over the foolish numbering of the people, which offended God's sovereignty and love? He fell into the hands of the Lord. But the destroying angel who slew Israel with the dreadful pestilence made the king experience how grievous it was to sin against God. In deep humiliation David cried out, "Lo, I have sinned, and I have done wickedly: but these sheep, what have they done? let thine hand, I pray Thee, be against me, and against my father's house" (2 Sam. 24:17).

Truly, the Lord does not ignore sin, not even in His people. And if by faith reconciliation and forgiveness are found alone in the righteousness of Christ, then there is experienced, through deep ways of chastisement, that God is incapable of doing any wickedness, and the Almighty of committing iniquity. All God's people will know something of this. May this always be before our eyes, so that

by God's grace we may hate and flee from sin. Happy is the man that feareth always. Notwithstanding the fact that there was in David's life a terrible forsaking of God's commandment and a treading upon it, the Lord did not cast away His servant. Then it would have been a lost case for David, and an irrevocably lost case for all God's people. But the gifts and callings of God are without repentance. David was even set as an example for all the kings who would sit upon the throne after him. For David, with a perfect heart, acknowledged the Lord alone as his God. Solomon's heart was drawn to the idols of his wives. It was not so with David. He cleaved to the Lord to serve Him alone and to walk uprightly before Him. That was the principal fruit of grace in David. In continual exercise of faith his soul could rest upon the Lord.

A few particulars out of David's life clearly illustrate this. Although the youngest son of Jesse was not much esteemed in his father's house, he was a courageous, mighty man. He slew a lion and a bear when they attacked his flock. David was not a hireling who fled, but a shepherd who ventured his life for his sheep. In God was his strength. How clearly that is seen when the uncircumcised Philistine, Goliath, defied the army of Israel. Not one of all the mighty men of Israel had the courage to go up to meet the blaspheming Philistine, even though the king had promised his elder daughter to the victor. But David could not tolerate the reproach put upon Jehovah and His people. Not with over-confidence or ambition, but out of love for the Name and cause of God, David went without armor and without spear. With a sling and a stone he cast the giant down and with his own sword cut off his head. Thousands sang his praises. He was praised more than Saul, but he did not extol himself. No matter what heights he attained, he remained clothed with humility—grace makes us humble. Later Saul was a bitter opponent of David. In bitter jealousy he refused to advance him. Merab was unjustly withheld from him, but on the other hand, Saul did not restrain the love of Michal, his younger daughter. She could have been a means to David's death—a hundred foreskins of the Philistines was to be the dowry—but David escaped this snare. He delivered twice the amount demanded. God was with him and as this became evident, Saul's enmity increased.

A separation took place—even Jonathan could not prevent it. And now a life commenced that led in ways which were so deep, so apparently contrary to the purpose for which the Lord had prepared David that the way could only be followed by faith.

Unlike Saul, David learned to wait upon God. Saul had not learned to do so. He had ignited the sacrifice himself when God tested him. Saul had the concerns of a warrior but did not have the true fear of God. How different was David's life! There is only one explanation for it—it was not that David was better than Saul, but

the faith which caused him to await the Lord's time was wrought in him by the grace of God.

At God's command David situated himself with four hundred men in the southern part of Judah. He delivered Keilah out of the hands of the Philistines. He also subdued the bands of robbers in the wilderness. He was a blessing for Judah.

And what was his reward? David was not safe anywhere. He was not safe behind the walls of Keilah, not in the wilderness of Ziph and not in the district of Havilah. Each time and place he was betrayed by his own people. But David did not avenge himself. His soul waited upon the Lord. He refused to deliver himself. Twice he spared Saul's life, even though his own men told him that God had given Saul into his hands. David's expectation was of the Lord and the Lord did not put him to shame. When Saul surrounded him, the Lord delivered David by compelling Saul to fight the Philistines.

In Ziklag a shelter was prepared for David. He lived for his people. The Lord saved him from the danger of joining in with the Philistines in battle against Israel. He also saved him from the dreadful threatenings of his own people when Ziklag was burned. But David encouraged himself in the Lord his God. The trial came to an end. David had not waited in vain. Faith did not fail. That is impossible, for faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.

Judah chose David as king in Hebron. But opposing David was Ishbosheth, the only remaining son of Saul. Again David held his peace. He did not take advantage of the weaker one. He waited—at God's time he would receive the kingdom. And again the Lord did not put him to shame. Ishbosheth was slain by assassins as was Abner by Joab's traitorous sword. Judah's king abhorred that evil but God made a path to the throne of Israel by those terrible means. At Hebron David became king over all the tribes. God crowns His own work. He promises but He also fulfills His promise.

Hebron was exchanged for Jerusalem. A mighty army was ready to ward off every enemy. No less than 1,300,000 men were trained under the command of the brave Joab. The six hundred mighty men who had followed David in his wanderings formed the nucleus of the army. Out of the Cretes and Philistines (the Cherithites and Pelethites) David formed a body guard, under the command of Benaiah. But this army lacked that which was the strength of the armies of the heathen. David had no horses or wagons. He even crippled the horses which he took as a prey, and burned the chariots—for his confidence was in the Lord. In childlike faith he gave his soul and those of his people into the hands of Jehovah—and the Lord granted the victory. First the Philistines fell into David's hands. The Moabites were also

defeated. Ammon was humbled as a punishment for the dishonor to which David's messengers had been subjected. The Syrians were subjected, and David even triumphed over the Edomites, the constant enemies of Israel. "The Lord has given us a banner to be displayed because of the truth," sang the king of Israel. It was the work of God. To Him be the glory. Follow David's life to the end: it is continually characterized by deep humiliation with a quiet confidence in the Lord, a waiting upon the God of his salvation.

That waiting is faith.

Saul was a stranger to this. He could not wait for God. It took too long for him. By nature we are all strangers to this true waiting. Our confidence is in the hills and the mountains, and our support in ourselves. There is nothing we dislike more than bowing under God. The joy of the world, the lust of sin, money and goods, honor and virtue—these are our strengths. How then can we bow under God? Who will truly have a desire for God's ways which are so contrary to flesh and blood? We can never walk in God's way except by denying self. And in ourselves self-denial is impossible. Oh, you who are strangers to God's grace, may your eyes be opened! With all your religion, even with all your sound confession, you do not know the way of the Lord. A wonder of grace must be glorified in us; otherwise we live our own lives as we will, and walk on without God and without Christ.

The Pharisee also was willing to thank God for all he thought he was, and for all the good which he did, but his thanksgiving did not arise out of the depth of humiliation. On the contrary, from the beginning to the end, it was full of self-praise. Thus our natural life is a confidence in self and knowing better than the Lord, as a Saul who rejected the Lord and was rejected by Him. Oh, that it might touch our hearts before it is too late! We are going onward to eternity, and we *cannot* go without God in Christ. May it become a lost case for us so that we may learn to seek salvation outside of ourselves! True faith comes from out of the depths of self-denial, as we saw time and again in David. We must forsake our high thoughts of self so that we may find our salvation in Christ, and in Him alone.

Faith is in exercise in those who truly wait upon the Lord and then there is a turning unto God. As, *humanly speaking*, David's kingship was impossible, so also all God's people have to learn the extent of their lost condition before God. But it does not leave them cold and indifferent. On the contrary, they cry out with David, "O God, Thou art my God; early will I seek Thee: my soul thirsteth for Thee, my flesh longeth for Thee in a dry and thirsty land, where no water is." God reveals to the waiting souls the salvation for which they earnestly seek. Whether it is salvation in being reconciled with God, the happiness of God's children which Ruth chose in-

stead of all of Moab, the deliverance of the soul which is promised, or the eternal glory which God reveals to His people, or even deliverance out of difficulties—whatever it may be, the Lord draws His people to the salvation upon which He has caused them to hope, and which, through Him, they actively desire. With high regard for the salvation promised, they long for the day of fulfillment. Often they sigh, "O Lord, how long?" as did the poet of Psalm 13. For God has promised them that salvation. David could not have expected the kingdom until after he had been anointed by Samuel. The Lord also speaks to His people in this way. God grants them that salvation in the promise. An expectation that does not rest upon God's promises to us is vain, and shall disappear as smoke. But those who by faith have expectation in the Lord may say with David:

*Lord, Thy word to me remember,
Thou hast made me hope in Thee.*

For although He who promised cannot lie, there can be no rest except in the fulfillment of the promise. And now it is so evident also in David's life that the fulfillment passes through a way of impossibility. How then could we ever walk in God's way if faith did not cause us to hope in His salvation?

Well then, people of God, may the Lord cause you to walk in the lively expectation of faith. It is certainly a sign of great darkness spread over the people of God that there is so little lively expectation in the heart. May it distress us when the fulfillment of the promise tarries. David sometimes had great fear. "I shall now perish one day by the hand of Saul," he cried. But that was not possible. It is not possible for any that are truly waiting upon the Lord. God will not forsake His own work. Let the hellish Saul chase and pursue; he is digging his own grave. It shall only cause us the more to seek shelter with the Lord and to plead with Him upon His Word so that there shall be no sitting still in our soul. The bride went through the streets of the city; she sought her beloved in all quarters. Thus, may our heart go out to seek Christ in whom all promises are yea, and in Him Amen, unto the glory of God. Let us destroy our Delilahs and Achans. Arise from your bed of slothfulness. God's promises do not serve as resting places, but as pleading grounds of faith.

May the Lord work in us a quiet dependence on Him, who at His time comes to His own to give them what He has promised them. May our hearts go out to learn to know Him, as He is the way to eternal life. Flow to Him as a stream of water so that He may set you at liberty. May our heart await His Advent wherewith He is coming to take all His people to Himself in glory.

Are there unfulfilled promises that cause the promised salva-

tion to keep fading out of sight? May David's life comfort and encourage our souls. God is faithful, who will also do it. With Him all things are possible, also those things which are impossible with us. May the faith which causes us to rely upon the Lord work powerfully in us by the Holy Spirit, so that even in the greatest adversities we may trust in Him who never forsakes the work of His hands. The faith which worked effectually in David will also strengthen us to testify with Habakkuk, "Although the fig tree shall not blossom, neither shall fruit be in the vines; the labor of the olive shall fail, and the fields shall yield no meat; the flock shall be cut off from the fold, and there shall be no herd in the stalls; yet I will rejoice in the Lord, I will joy in the God of my salvation."

CHAPTER XXXV

Samuel and the Prophets

"To tell of . . . Samuel and of the Prophets."

—Hebrews 11:32

Samuel was Hannah's son.

He was the son of a woman who, in deep humility, bore her sorrow in silence. Peninnah was much happier than she. Peninnah had children; Hannah did not. And, conscious of being blessed above Hannah, Peninnah sorely provoked Elkanah's unfruitful wife, and vexed her. Elkanah tried to compensate to Hannah for Peninnah's actions by giving her a worthy portion above Peninnah together with her sons and daughters, but her husband's loving care could not remove Hannah's sorrow. Hannah suffered in silence. Family grief consumed her. It caused her to weep before God, and to supplicate in Jehovah's sanctuary. The hand of God was in this sorrow. He also directed Hannah's way. In these deep, hidden stirrings of the soul the Lord worked the first awakenings of Israel's deliverer. Wonderful are the ways of God!

The Philistines ruled over Israel. To have sought for a humbling of the nation, a penitent confession of guilt before God, and a returning to God among the old covenant people was vain. The Lord was the first to act. He arose for Israel's deliverance. His arm wrought salvation.

This is what God's people must learn and understand: "I do this not for your sakes." It is impossible that God would do it because of anything in man. Then it would be a lost case for God's people. Who is it that asks after God? Would the Lord wait for that? Even after having received grace, we forsake God and we turn to our own ways, but if we shall turn to God in truth, it will be due to the drawing power of His grace—He is the First and the Last, the Beginning and the End.

The Lord has taken reason out of Himself to remember Israel. He worked a work of deliverance for His people. His eye beheld Hannah, the woman of Mount Ephraim, and He directed her path.

He heard her complaint. The priest saw it as the behavior of a drunkard, but the Lord did not despise the weeper. Hannah could sing:

*The suff'ring one He has not spurned
Who unto Him for succor turned;
From him He has not hid His face,
But answered his request in grace.*

The Lord causes His people to be exercised through deep ways of oppression. He drives them to Himself. They shall come to Him with weeping and supplication. They are a blessed people who are no strangers to pouring their souls out before the Lord, bringing their complaints and distresses to Him who alone tries the heart. He understands every complaint since He was tempted in all things, sin excepted. Oh, it cannot be expressed in words what it is to truly flee to God with our needs! Oh, that we knew more of it in the exercise of our soul!

God again raised up a judge for Israel. This time it was not a Samson whose mother was under the vow, but a Samuel who was loaned by his mother to the Lord, and who by God's grace was separated unto His service. Already as a child he was in the temple of the Lord and God the Holy Spirit worked in him, and only because of this did he differ from the wicked sons of Eli.

Notice how that nothing is too wonderful for the Lord. No one is too old to be converted unto God, but neither is anyone too young. Our fathers often published and recommended stories of the ways in which God led young children. May the grace in the young Samuel affect our children! Temptations are so strong. On all sides sin attracts, the world draws them, and Satan lies in wait for them. But may the Lord cause us to turn our eyes away from the world and to look to Him. Oh, that we might truly learn to know Him! We would not bemoan our young days spent in His service for there is no greater good than to fear the Lord.

With an audible voice the Lord called Samuel in His temple. The lad heard but did not understand. Three times he thought it was Eli calling him. But the Lord had spoken.

And the Lord continued to appear in Shiloh, for the Lord revealed Himself to Samuel at Shiloh—by the Word of the Lord. That revelation was in the first place for *Samuel*. For God will speak to those who live before Him. He calls His people by name. But this revelation also had such great value for *all Israel*. Not in the sanctuary of His dwelling, but by His Word Jehovah reveals Himself. By prophecy, Christ in the ministration of His Spirit shall glorify Himself more and more as a Prophet. Moses spoke of Him as the Prophet whom God would raise up. Now then, in Israel, in the shadows and in the better ministration, the glorious Word of Christ shall be heard to the salvation of sinners.

God's people do not live by dreams and visions, but by the Word which proceeds out of the mouth of God. Many people think of the experience of God's people as something visionary, usually rooted in the imagination. Many speak of high experiences and of visions full of awe. But the Lord leads His own according to His Word and by His Word. True knowledge of God and of self is wrought by the light of God's testimony, and the promise of God is applied to the soul; indeed, salvation in Christ is sealed to the heart by the Word. Therefore it becomes the language of God's people: "Thy words were found, and I did eat them, and they were sweeter than honey and the honeycomb."

Superficial, Reformed Christendom understands nothing of this. It is hidden from the wise and prudent, but is revealed unto babes, according to His sovereign good pleasure. But then those babes are also builded upon the foundation of the apostles and the prophets, of which Jesus Christ is the chief cornerstone. Let everything fall away, just as God's people actually encounter in their further experiences. Oh, so much falls away in which they formerly sought comfort and life! But then the only fountain of God's revelation still remains; indeed, it becomes firmer and richer. In the applying of the Spirit His Word is a light upon their path, a lamp for their feet. By speaking to Samuel, God desired to give that Word to His church more clearly. Alongside the shadows which are falling away, the enduring revelation in the Word of the Lord arises.

Samuel administered this Word. In him the prophetic office came to the foreground, while the priesthood, by its own sin, was pressed into the background. However harsh the judgment was in the message of God to young Samuel, by faith he trusted in the Lord's testimonies. Israel clung to Samuel after the death of Eli, and in him the people saw the successor God had appointed. God would qualify him to judge Israel. By faith he appeared as Israel's reformer, and he delivered the people at Mizpeh where the Lord Himself fought with them. Thus the land was cleansed from idols and from the enemies.

From year to year Samuel traveled by circuit to judge Israel. He upheld the justice of the Lord. God gave a second Moses to build upon the theocratic foundation. At Ramah Samuel built an altar unto the Lord. In all things Samuel proclaimed the greatness of God and the claim that the Lord had upon these people. That is especially evident in the latter part of his life.

Samuel's sons refused to walk in the ways of the Lord. They could not succeed their father. The prophetic office did not pass from father to son as the priesthood did. Soon Israel would perish. For who would arise to battle? Nahash the Ammonite threatened them with war. The people forgot God and called for a king. They desired a hereditary kingship, as the nations roundabout; then

they no longer would need to fear any enemies. The fact that God was the King of the nation was denied; that He, the Lord of lords, had gone to battle for His people was forgotten. They wanted to put a man in the place of God. Old Israel gave up its high appointment of a royal priesthood for an earthly kingship.

Samuel resisted this evil. By faith he clung to the Lord and testified against the rejection of Jehovah. God is King. That was what Samuel acknowledged. By faith Samuel bowed before the God of gods.

Notice that in true exercise of faith God's greatness is declared—that He is the Lord, the King of His people. By faith that becomes the acknowledgment of the heart. Faith always re-opens the gates of the soul for King Jesus. It keeps man humble in order that the crown may be placed upon Christ. He who has not learned to bow before the King of Zion lacks true faith. Oh, that it might be the portion of all of us to fall down in truth at the feet of the Lord! "Kiss the Son, lest He be angry, and ye perish from the way, when His anger is kindled but a little." Yes, may we receive the King into our hearts more and more. So often many exalt themselves upon the throne. Princes arise who deny Israel's King—princes of pride and self-righteousness, of self-honor and fleshly lust, and many more. They all must surrender to cry out by faith that the Lord is our Lawgiver and our King.

May God's people, like Samuel, have a holy indignation against sin, against the dreadful denial of Israel's King, against the sins of the church of God, and also against the sins of our nation. Oh, may the Lord have mercy upon us, and leave us not over to the imagination of our hearts! May He glorify Himself, and cause us by faith to truly bow before Him. May He reveal His truth in us that He will honor those who honor Him, and that to those who walk in His ways, He will show His salvation.

CHAPTER XXXVI

Wrought Righteousness

"Who through faith subdued kingdoms, wrought righteousness, obtained promises."

—Hebrews 11:33

To the power of true faith Paul not only ascribed the conquest of kingdoms, but also many more privileges summarized by him in the latter part of Hebrews 11.

By faith they wrought righteousness.

The most important act of faith is that, by union with Christ, it justifies the sinner. God's elect become partakers of the righteousness in Christ and have profit of it for their soul, inasmuch as they receive it with a believing heart. But this union with Christ also causes the soul to bear fruits of righteousness. "He that doeth righteousness is righteous, even as He is righteous" (1 John 3:7). On the other hand, "He that committeth sin is of the devil; for the devil sinneth from the beginning." Only by faith can we truly break with sin, with the world, and with Satan. Outward changes can take place which enable an escape in truth, from the kingdom of darkness. As a soldier can change weapons or go from infantry to cavalry, but still be serving the same king, so a person can go from the gross service of the world and sin to the outward service of the church, but even with that great change, still be serving Satan, the prince of darkness. Although in itself such a change is to be commended and urged upon every one as necessary, it lacks the essential renewing that is indispensable for salvation.

I remember having encountered several great changes in people during the course of my ministry which showed clear evidence of lacking the true ground. I have seen people come faithfully to the house of God for years who later fell off as a leaf. Sometimes the changes were very impressive and those reformations were brought about with power and much family strife. Many tears were shed during the preaching of the Word. I would be able to mention the names of some who, after attaining a position in society and their disquieted consciences being stilled, joined the mockers and enemies of God's people. Similar experiences are related in God's

Word: the changes of the Orpahs and the Ahabs; the tears of the Esaus; the confessions of the Cains and Judases. In Saul's time, the people cried out with amazement, "Is Saul also among the prophets?" He had been given another heart, but not a new heart. In a word, these people lack the *root* of faith. They were never transplanted into Christ; therefore they have never wrought righteousness. They do not understand what mortification of sin is—that is known only to the quickened people because the power of Christ is glorified in them.

"For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that He might destroy the works of the devil." And He destroys these evil works in His people. Therefore it is characteristic of each of God's children to mourn over their sins. They shall deny ungodliness and worldly lusts, living soberly, righteously, and godly in this present world (Titus 2:12). Alas, how contrary to this is the happy Christendom of these days! They rationalize a faith which is above all strife. The poor, sighing people are despised in their eyes, and they think of them as being sickly and foolish. With their "healthy" faith they can happily enjoy the world, and thus they give evidence that they have not died unto sin. Oh, what a sad revelation!

Even if they confined their lives to so-called "lawful amusements," any impression of the love of Christ would cause them to give up all their worldly enjoyments; one true impression of the dreadfulness of sin would cause them to say of mirth, "It is mad." But such a life is strange to them. Nor does nature teach it. Such a life is brought about only by Christ. His grace discovers to us our sins and our sinful natures, and causes sin to be a true grief to us. God's people smite themselves upon their breast with the publican and cry out, "God be merciful to me a sinner." God the Holy Spirit plants faith which seeks after righteousness and brings it into exercise. No, it is not a sanctification which flows from self which is only a tempering of evil affections, but a holy walk that is obtained through faith by the power of Him who died unto sin.

By His power God's people die unto sin to live unto God. Their entire life is a dying life, even to the last breath, so that they, through faith, might work righteousness. By faith David testified, "I will behave myself wisely in a perfect way. . . . I will walk within my house with a perfect heart." Yes, as king, every morning he would destroy all the wicked of the land; that he might cut off all wicked-doers from the city of the Lord (Psalm 101).

Oh, that our rulers and authorities were gifted with true faith! Then in churches and in the nation conditions would truly be different from what they are now. Sin would be cast down, and God's law and justice would be revered. "Lack of faith is the cause of all the injustice and oppression that is in the world," says Owen, and rightly so. How this universal falling away should

make God's people concerned so that sighs and entreaties for the pouring out of His Spirit would ascend to God's throne of grace! In the midst of increasing wickedness, may the Lord stir up in His people the lively exercises of faith, so that they may work righteousness and cry out against the sins which are committed in the midst of the city.

A tender life will cause us, by faith, to hate sin more and more and to love what God loves. By grace let there be in our own heart a casting down of evil, so that from within the fruit of righteousness may be born. Who must not complain here about himself? Who must not acknowledge that too often evil dwells in his heart? Oh, that faith may be stirred up to work righteousness! If that were to occur, we would not be strangers to what Paul further ascribes to faith, namely, that believers have obtained the promises.

This statement does not at all contradict that which is declared in Hebrews 11:39, namely, that they received not the promise. That verse refers to the promise of Christ's coming in the flesh. That promise the believers of the old covenant have not obtained; they did not live to see the fulfillment of it. They died having faith. Although the time of the fulfillment was set in later years, this did not take away the fact that the promises upon which they hoped had often been fulfilled. Abraham by faith received a son; Isaac likewise. Joshua's expectation to conquer the land of promise was not in vain. Gideon had no vain expectation that he would conquer the Midianites, nor was David's expectation of becoming king over all Israel in vain. They obtained the promises through the greatest resistance. Whatever made the fulfillment impossible, humanly speaking, faith set its expectation upon Him who is able to do everything. Thus Abraham also, although as good as dead, received a son; and Isaac hoped for twenty years. Joshua conquered all his enemies; Gideon conquered with three hundred men. David waited upon God knowing that He was mighty to fulfill what He had promised even though Saul hunted him as a partridge on the mountain. From this we may learn that both the granting and the fulfilling of the promise are the works of God. He causes His people to understand this by often causing the fulfillment of the promised deliverance to come in such deep ways that they are forced to leave the promise in God's hands. Who among those who ever learned to hope for salvation in Christ has not been brought to a total impossibility where He considers himself lost? By their deserved ruin and destruction, they learn that God who is the Strength of Israel cannot lie. And whatever matter is embraced by faith in the promise, it is the constant experience of all God's children, as is clearly evident in the lives of Bible saints, that God's promises are fulfilled through the deepest impossibilities. But then that fulfillment is obtained only by faith. Oh, hoping people of God, take

courage. Thy soul shall live joyfully. Do not waver too much when great darkness comes upon your path and strong assaults distress your soul. God shall never violate His truth. Also in the distress of battle may your faith rely upon the Lord and may you cling to Him who is invisible. Plead with the Lord upon His Word. Tell Him what He has promised. Let your soul be exercised by faith to wait upon Him who shall confirm that through faith the promises are obtained. God is faithful—who will also do it.

In all your vexations, may your eyes be upon the Lord. There is nothing harder for us than to wait on the Lord while our heart is full of mistrust and impatience. Nevertheless, the Lord often desires to exercise the faith of His people by postponing the promised thing for a long time in order to prove that those who trust in the Lord shall be as Mount Zion, which cannot be removed, but abideth forever (Ps. 125:1).

CHAPTER XXXVII

Out of Weakness Were Made Strong

*"Who through faith . . . stopped the mouths of lions,
quenched the violence of fire, escaped the edge of the
sword, out of weakness were made strong, waxed valiant
in fight, turned to flight the armies of the aliens."*

—Hebrews 11:33 and 34

To the conquering power of faith the apostle ascribes the frustrating of the greatest rage of the most cruel oppressors and persecutors of the Church of God. Their rage was so great that it is compared to the mouths of lions. As raging beasts with their mouths wide open, they fall upon the heritage of the Lord; they were as the king of the beasts in their terrible strength. As a lion causes everything within miles to quake and tremble when he opens his mouth to roar, so the violent rulers of the world cause fear and trembling in the poor people of God. But faith shall gain the victory over this violence. Samson rent the young lion which came roaring against him; David slew the lion that took a lamb from his flock—thus faith shall render the most terrible enemies harmless. Daniel, too, was an example of this when not one lion hurt him, for God had sent His angel to shut the mouths of the lions because Daniel believed in God.

However great the danger may be which the most raging enemy threatens, everything shall yield to faith. The martyrs became conquerors in death. But often the Lord delivers His people, and saves them from those that rise up against them. Although at present no persecution with the stake or the scaffold is threatened, the world seeks to put pressure upon God's people in many ways. What deep hurts and painful treatments God's children must sometimes suffer from the ruling ones of the earth! Do they not have dominion over them? But how often God changed the lions into lambs, silenced their cursing mouths, closed the lions's mouths, and gave His sighing people the victory. For those who fear the Lord there are times that they go to their work with fear. They have times that their factory, shop, office, or school is as a

prison to them. But at God's time they are given courage and are enabled to lose sight of their oppressors and to free themselves from all those who distress them. By faith they can walk up to the lions with their open jaws, and close those mouths. In small as well as large matters, the Lord is mighty for His covenant people. The strength of faith shines forth and causes them to glory in the Lord. Through faith, the mouths of Satan, sin, death, and hell are stopped.

Yes, believers have quenched the violence of fire—not the fire itself, but the violence of it. Natural means serve to quench the fire. By faith the burning fire is robbed of its strength. The young men in the fiery furnace were clear evidence of this. So great was the heat and violence of the fire, that the sparks killed the men who had taken up Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. The faith of the young men, however, quenched the violence of the fire. Even the hair of their heads did not burn, neither were their coats changed, nor had the smell of fire passed on them. Their faith failed not before the hottest oven. Through true faith the God-fearing young men were enabled to trust the Lord completely. His commandment and His honor were more precious to them than their own lives. Whatever it would please the Lord to do, whether to save them from the hand of the King of Babylon or not, they could not act contrary to the commandment of God. Through faith they surrendered themselves entirely to the Lord, and through that surrendering faith they quenched the violence of the fire.

Oh, that we had something of this true faith in constant exercise! The world knows nothing of it. Although they, like Nebuchadnezzar and the world's great ones, are dismayed at the results, they have not the least understanding of this faith. They mock with it and turn away from it. Poor, foolish worldling! Your strength shall perish. Your confidence is vain. You cannot bear the fiery trial for you shall be consumed as hay and stubble. Oh, that by the grace of God your eyes may be opened "before the decree bring forth, before the day pass as the chaff." God's children have within themselves an unconquerable principle; through faith they quench the violence of the fire, regardless of the heat generated.

Shall the Christendom of our days be able to pass the test of fire? It is to be feared that thousands who even bear the name of Reformed Christians lack that true faith. They cannot even endure outward oppression; the scorn of the world is too heavy; they cannot live a separated life. Their accommodating to the world, their cooperating with the world, and their enjoying the world betray their inner feelings.

How shall *we* endure if God tries *us* by fire? Will great multitudes turn back if the fire of Babylon is kindled? How many will seek to escape the fire of God's eternal wrath to which they in their lifetime have not given heed! A superficial agreeing with the truth

is not enough. Let everyone try himself and search his heart. Hypocrisy shall not withstand the violence of the fire. This can be done only through a true, unconquerable faith being lived out of Christ Jesus who was dead and lives forevermore. Through that faith God's people are privileged to freely surrender themselves to the Lord. Wherever their path leads, whether it be through fire or water, faith embraces the Lord and His commandments. In the keeping of them there is great reward. The violence of the fire and the heat of opposition are quenched through faith. However hot the fire is burning, it does not matter; its violence does not singe one hair.

They who walked in faith have joyfully viewed the spoiling of their goods; with songs of praise they have entered into death. Oh, shame must cover our faces as we flee for the mere rustling of a leaf! Fear of man fills us more than the childlike fear of God. The fear of man so often causes us to deny the Lord and His work, just as Peter did in the hall of Caiaphas in answer to the question of a simple maiden.

What are we in ourselves? What can we do in our own strength? Should not the experience of our own fearful and faithless hearts humble us most deeply? But so much the more wonderful is the strength of faith working in those who are timid and weak. Through faith they can do all things; they overcome the world; they do not fear the fire; they also quench the violence of the fire. Prisons have become gardens in which they freely walk wherein resound hymns of praise; fetters and chains are transformed into tokens of victory in the conquest of faith. Thus faith causes them to sing in the dark nights of oppression and distress, and to wait upon the Lord. However precious the experiences of faith may be when the hot fire is kindled, God's people must never *seek* persecution. On the contrary, they must flee from their enemies when possible. The heroes of faith about whom the apostle wrote in this chapter also did so; they escaped the edge of the sword.

When David was hunted by Saul as a partridge in the mountains, he escaped by fleeing on several occasions. Elijah the prophet also "arose and went for his life" when Jezebel threatened to kill him. Faith does not act recklessly; it does not tempt the Lord, but seeks the right ways to escape the sword. We may observe that at times rashness would have us go in other ways. Who among God's people has not had times when he wished that the sword would pursue him and, impelled by love, he desired to give himself up unto death? But also, who has not become like Peter, who, when walking upon the sea, sank when he saw the waves? In our rashness we disdain fleeing from the sword, but God will humble pride in the hearts of His people so that they shall walk the good way of faith. That way is on the one hand to quench the violence of

the fire, and on the other hand to escape the sword. That faith works wonderfully when it gains the victory by flight. Is it not for the purpose of humbling us? Verily, faith makes us small; it cannot be exercised by the great, the strong, and the mighty, as each person thinks he is by nature. The working of faith in the weak, the foolish, and the despised is contrary to flesh and blood. Thus we can understand what Paul now says regarding the true believers—that out of weakness they were made strong.

How many sick have been made well by faith, even when all medicines failed! Hezekiah was sick unto death and received the message that he would die. He then turned his face to the wall and prayed and the Lord was ready to deliver him. That same God still lives, and that same faith often strengthens God's people in times of sickness and weakness. In some instances, over against the serious diagnoses of doctors, this activity of faith shines forth. Contrary to the doctors' opinions, many of the sick are enabled to leave their beds. Yes, they arose with the multitude that kept holy day, when their souls fainted with longing for the courts of the Lord. God does wonders!

Not only were their bodies made strong out of physical weakness, but their weary souls were strengthened by faith. Here the word of Isaiah is also applicable, "They that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run, and not be weary; and they shall walk, and not faint." There are sicknesses of the soul that greatly weaken the spiritual strength of God's people. Indwelling sin wearies the soul—that terrible warfare that in this life will never cease. Prayer slackens; hope fades away; God's kindly face hides itself; there is darkness roundabout, and there is no strength to raise one's self. However, out of that sad weakness, faith lifts up the soul. For, by faith, strength is received to flee to Christ in whom there is reconciliation and deliverance, and to His blood which cleanses from all sin. How repeatedly God's people experience in this way that faith is made strong out of weakness.

With God's permission, Satan can vex God's children with such lengthy and terrible assaults that they sink down—tired, weak, and weary. However, God's grace is sufficient to withstand the attacks of the hellish powers and faith causes them to rest upon that grace. Weak creatures receive strength to even defeat Satan and his legions. By faith they are more than conquerors. According to His Word, God's grace is sufficient for all the ways in which the Lord leads them. Observe them weakened under heavy oppressions and persistent adversities, sadly bowed down under the enmity of those who are of the world. Hear how they, discouraged, ask for death, as Elijah did under the juniper tree, or in whatever other circumstances which show that flesh and blood shall not

inherit the kingdom of heaven—but hear then also that He who never forsakes the works of His hands causes them, through faith, to receive strength to conquer all their weaknesses. Indeed, faith strengthened the weak so much that they “waxed valiant in fight,” as Joshua, Barak, Gideon, Jephthah, Samson, and David, whose hands God taught to war, so that a bow of steel was broken by their arms. He makes the weak strong so that they turn to flight the armies of the aliens.

The large army of the Midianites could not stand before Gideon’s little band any more than Sisera with all his chariots could stand before Barak, or Goliath and his Philistines could stand before David. Whatever hosts were brought into the field, by faith they were all driven away.

People of God, are we not often too great and too strong to exercise this faith? Too often we rest upon an experience of long ago. We are too converted, too surely justified in self to flee by faith to Him as one who is weak and sick and not able to do anything or to flee to Him who by His resurrection from the dead obtained the victory and in whom all His people shall be conquerors.

Come with me from Lebanon. The myrtles grow in deep places. May the Lord humble and abase us. May He cause that faith to be exercised in us so that we may know ourselves to be poor and yet rich, to be weak and yet mighty. May His hand support us in all our sorrow, warfare, and assaults. Although we feel ourselves to be weak and ready to faint, He shall raise us up, and by faith, cause us to lift up our heads. Then the mouths of the lions will be shut, fire will be robbed of its violence, and mighty hosts will be put to flight. How often has the Lord given you that experience! Should we then not hope in Him who never puts to shame those who trust in Him? My flesh and my heart faileth, but God is the strength of my heart, and my portion forever.

CHAPTER XXXVIII

Faith in Suffering

"Women received their dead raised to life again: and others were tortured, not accepting deliverance; that they might obtain a better resurrection."

—Hebrews 11:35

True faith not only gives supernatural powers to conquer all resistance, but also *upright* faith causes men to cheerfully endure the most painful suffering. The apostle has given abundant evidences of the victory of faith. No less impressive are Paul's testimonies about the powerful workings of faith in suffering. Gideon defeated the enemy with three hundred men; Barak likewise won the war against a superior enemy; Samson fought the battle of the Lord alone; Jephthah, David, Samuel, and so many more through faith have subdued kingdoms. If there is anything that should cause us to marvel at the power of faith ascribed by the Holy Spirit, it must be the ability to attain complete victory over all our enemies.

But, however strong *conquering* faith appears to be, the *strength* of faith is no less significant when it supports us as we undergo the most severe suffering. According to the flesh there may be a difference, but in the exercise of faith there is no difference. Both in the casting down of the enemy and in the humbling of the children of God, faith triumphs. However incomprehensible it may be for the natural man, faith works powerfully in the humiliation, contempt, grief, and sorrow which God's children are subject to in this life. Even when the enemy struck at the lives of God's elect and seemed to win, faith triumphed. The apostle says this in verse 35 of Hebrews 11. In the greatest sorrows, faith gave strength; indeed, "women received their dead raised to life again."

The widow of Zarephath and the Shunammite woman serve as proofs. After the wonderful deliverance from death for both mother and child, God took away the son of the widow of Zarephath. Who can describe the sorrow of this poor widow? And then by faith her child was restored to her. In faith Elijah prayed that the soul of the deceased son be restored, and the Lord heard his voice. No less did faith work in Elisha when the son of the Shunammite woman had died. It was of no effect when Gehazi laid his master's staff upon

the boy. Then the prophet followed the grieving mother and entered the room where the deceased son of the Shunammite woman lay, and prayed to the Lord. The prophet stretched himself twice over the body of the boy, and the boy became alive again. He sneezed seven times and then opened his eyes. "The women received their dead raised to life again."

Is there anything too great for faith? In these supernatural deeds take notice of the power of true faith. There is no reasoning after death—a superficial faith which has no root in Christ ceases and is defeated. But true faith restored the dear departed loved ones. It may especially strengthen God's people that these powers are ascribed to faith. Faith as a mustard seed will remove mountains and cast them into the midst of the sea. Oh, that the power of true faith would be exercised more in us! Truly, then God's people would be lifted up above their afflictions and would walk in fine garments in the midst of an utterly corrupt world. They would also scorn enmity and persecution.

What indisputable examples Paul mentions in the second part of the text with which we headed this chapter: "Others were tortured, not accepting deliverance; that they might obtain a better resurrection."

Here the apostle treads upon the field of the martyrs. He does so for the comfort of the assaulted heritage of the Lord. Oppression and persecution should not overtake them by surprise, nor should they think a strange thing happened to them. Others have preceded them on the same way to eternal glory. How the upright in heart must be comforted by knowing that their path is sketched in the Word of God! If it were not so, upon what would they build their hope? They would be surrendered to the wild waves of the sea. But the way of God's children is described in the Word of the Lord. If divine light may fall upon it, then even in our greatest sorrows our hearts also shall be at rest and await the coming of the Lord.

Therefore, the Lord Jesus Himself once said, "If any man will come after Me, let him take up His cross and follow Me." And Peter encouraged the scattered strangers with these words, "Knowing that the same afflictions are accomplished in your brethren that are in the world." Paul also speaks to the oppressed of the sufferings that others have undergone before them. Let them then be strengthened with the hope of redemption, which they, too, shall obtain by faith.

Notice especially that the apostle mentions examples of those who underwent unusual suffering and very special oppression. The dreadful miseries mentioned here are not ordinary dealings in God's providence. With God's permission they were oppressed by the most cruel enemies of those who fear the Lord. Not for their own sin, not for injustice committed, but for their *faith* and for

their *upright confession* of the living God the Christians of ancient days were persecuted. And in those most bitter persecutions the glory of faith shone forth. The unusual glory of the church does not only shine forth in courageous deeds, but also in overwhelming hardships. When the worldling looks upon God's oppressed, poor, despised, and hated people, it can only harden him and cause him to despise them the more. But if our eyes may be opened to see the salvation which God's people are partakers of, we shall be filled with admiration for the glory which shines forth in the greatest tribulations and the most horrible violence of the world. By faith the afflicted and the tempest-tossed are comforted and refreshed, and also strengthened to bear the cross which is laid upon them. God receives the glory and the true children of Zion taste the favor of God which makes them scorn all grief.

In the second book of the Maccabees two striking incidents are mentioned. According to highly respected expositors, Paul here refers to them. They were the martyr's death of Eleazer and that of seven brothers and their mother. Eleazer was one of the most important scribes, and the heathen enemies wanted to force him to eat swine's flesh. They forced open Eleazer's mouth, but he spit out the unclean meat and rebuked them for despising God's commandments. In the face of death, they offered to bring the ninety-year-old man clean meat to eat, if only he would pretend to be eating swine's meat. But Eleazer also refused to do that, so that the young people would not be misled and excuse themselves saying, Eleazer also has become a heathen. "What would it help me," he said, "if I thus escaped the punishment of men, since whether living or dead, I cannot escape the hands of God?" Under the blows of enemies, his last words were, "The Lord, from whom nothing is hidden, knows that I could have been delivered from the blows and the great pain I suffer in my body, if I had so desired, but because of my soul I suffer it gladly, for God's sake." And thus he died, not accepting the deliverance of men.

In those days seven brothers and their mother were taken prisoners and beaten with scourges and lashes. The king, in raging anger because of their unshakable faithfulness, gave orders to cut the tongue from the mouth of the eldest before the eyes of his mother and brothers, to cut off his hands and feet, and thus maimed, to broil him in a pan. Thus they did with each, one after another. Strengthened by faith, they admonished each other to die fearlessly, "For God, the Lord, shall see the right, and will be merciful to us." It was a great wonder for the mother, and it is an example worthy to be recorded about her. For she saw all her seven sons being martyred, one after the other, in one day, and she bore it with great patience because she had hope in God. She received so much courage that she could comfort one son after the other and

urged them to have manly courage. She said to them, "I am indeed your mother, and have borne you, but I have not given you breath and life, nor have I made your members thus; therefore He who made the world and all men will graciously give to you again your breath and your life, as you are now risking it and surrendering it for His law." Indeed, after the king had seriously admonished her to spare her youngest son from martyrdom, she exhorted the boy the more to stand fast. "Do not fear the executioner," she said, "but die gladly, as your brothers have done, so that our gracious God will revive you, together with your brothers, and give you back to me."

These are two outstanding examples of those who did not accept deliverance from man that they might obtain a better resurrection. Faith in the eternal, blessed resurrection caused them to despise the proffered deliverance.

These and similar examples Paul has set before believers, so that, seeing the power of faith, they would be strengthened in all their needs and their miseries. If in these special and dreadful cruelties faith gave strength to bear all this, how much more may God's people be encouraged in other distresses. For each of God's children has his own path determined by God, with his own sorrow, oppression, and adversities. It is not the same for each person, but God's people must experience again that grace makes a separation between them and the world. "I will put enmity" said the Lord, and that continues. But God's work likewise continues in the faith of His people.

Oh, people of God, that your soul may live! The world hates and despises you, but it shall be destroyed. One day God shall judge it according to His righteousness. Poor worldlings! Haters and persecutors of the people of God, soon you shall stand before God's judgment seat. Oh, that the terror of the Lord might move you to faith! Oh, you who are unconverted of heart and strangers of the work of the Spirit, your portion shall be with those enemies of God's people whom you now perhaps shun. May Christ become your portion, and by faith may you find your refuge in Him. All that is outside of Him shall one day fall away.

Here God's people may be despised and persecuted unto death, but . . .

*He saves their souls when death draws nigh,
This God is our salvation.*

The resurrection! Yes, it is coming. Then all the dead shall rise again. God shall raise them up in the last day. Oh, that last day! The righteous shall enter eternal life. Soul and body together shall forever be before the throne. That is the better resurrection of which Paul speaks. It is better than the deliverance from death which the enemy offered.

May our hearts be set on that resurrection! May our hearts be directed to it more than to the world. Let them rob us of all things: money, property and life itself, but eternal life is prepared for God's children—a better resurrection. Your tribulation is one of only ten days. Soon you will be with soul and body before the throne of God to perfectly and eternally glorify and praise the Lord who loves you—the only one and triune God—forever and ever.

CHAPTER XXXIX

Of Whom the World was not Worthy

"And others had trial of cruel mockings and scourgnings, yea, moreover of bonds and imprisonment: they were stoned, they were sawn asunder, were tempted, were slain with the sword: they wandered about in sheepskins and goat-skins; being destitute, afflicted, tormented; (of whom the world was not worthy:) they wandered in deserts, and in mountains, and in dens and caves of the earth."

—Hebrews 11:36-38

God's ways always vary. Each of His children is led in God's own way. Although they all experience misery, deliverance, and gratitude, each has his own path of life. A white stone is given them, and in the stone a new name written which no man knows saving he who receives it. So the Lord will be glorified by all His people, by each individual in the way that God leads him. This is also clearly evident in the summarizing of the many and various exercises of faith that Paul writes about in Hebrews 11.

"Others had trial of cruel mockings and scourgings," writes the apostle. The word "others" does not mean only other *persons*, but also another way, another experience. These "others" form a new group of believers who by faith endured suffering and have conquered. All did not have to undergo the dreadful lot of those whom the apostle mentioned in the preceding verses. Satan is not always permitted to rage against the heritage of the Lord with stake and scaffold. Although the malice of Satan never diminishes and the enmity of the world always remains the same, God sets limits to the power of hell, and Satan can do nothing contrary to the Lord's will. Nevertheless, it remains true that all who will live godly lives shall suffer persecution. If the enemy does not put God's people to death, he shows his enmity in other ways, such as mocking, scourging, bands, imprisonment, etc.

May the Lord grant us attentiveness so that we may understand the lesson He teaches us here. We must never measure another by the way God deals with us. The Lord leads each person

as it pleases Him. Moreover, outward circumstances do not determine the genuineness of the work of God. Heavy afflictions can be borne and severe persecutions can be suffered; indeed, men can enter "death" for other motives than the true fear of God. Even those in heathendom can point to martyrs for the causes which they profess; also Rome writes about those who gave their lives for their faith. However, these people lacked what Paul relates of the true believers. I cannot refrain from pointing out that severe convictions and fearful distresses can be experienced without having true communion with Christ. I have seen people experience very deep convictions who later returned to serving the world with the mockers. With the dog they have returned to their vomit, and with the sow that was washed to her wallowing in the mire. Therefore, it is so foolish and reprehensible to say what I once heard a man say to his wife, who had come under conviction. She was in deep distress, and he told her that her end would be in eternal perdition, saying "If your distress doesn't make you climb the walls, it is nothing." He said that was the way it had gone with him. However, God's people had more confidence in her than in him. Aside from this, it is contrary to Scripture; it is being critical of the sovereign ministry of the Holy Spirit to measure another's way by our own. Paul speaks of "others" who also had true faith, but whose paths differed from those mentioned before.

We people do piecework. The bricks we make are uniform in size and the bricklayer knows how to fit them together perfectly. But God's work is always both of one nature and yet always distinct. His work bears the imprint of His hand and cannot be limited by us. The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth: so is everyone that is born of the Spirit. God has revealed the true marks of the life of grace in His Word. We may examine ourselves by them, but likewise, we must understand that God leads His people in the way to heaven as it pleases Him. By faith some have subdued kingdoms; others stopped the mouths of lions; others quenched the violence of fire; others were tortured, not accepting deliverance; others had trials of cruel mockings and scourgings, and also bonds and imprisonment. They were not persecuted unto death because God prevented it.

The world however gave vent to their wrath by mockings, scourgings, bonds, and imprisonment. Because of the piety of God's people, they were objects of bitter mockery! As followers of the Lord, in these circumstances they also walked in His steps. The soldiers platted a crown of thorns and placed it upon His head with a reed in His right hand. They bowed the knee before Him and mocked Him saying, "Hail, King of the Jews!"

In that mockery God's people also receive a share. The world is never more sharp-witted, nor is it more pleased with itself, says Owen, than when it can invent contemptible names, mockeries, and crimes to cast upon suffering believers. That mockery is to be reckoned among the sufferings of His people. The fierce accusations of the enemy, as well as the offense of the person mocked, increase such suffering greatly. Mockery causes the soul to endure more suffering than many physical pains. It is no minor tribulation to be an object of mockery and scorn and to abide under the triumphant onslaught of the worldling.

Still God often allows His people to be mocked. It is not necessary to delve into the old histories of the church to look for proofs of this. The examples are evident round about us: in the shop, in the factory, in the office, among the higher and the lower classes; everywhere, we find mockers who bitterly grieve the souls of God's people. In books and in newspapers the upright are portrayed as foolish and ignorant. The children of God also have human feelings and, like all human beings, they grieve under such contempt. Then there can be but one victory—the victory of faith. When faith is in exercise—and those despised people may know that fundamentally they are mocked for the cause of God and for His honor—oh, then the most bitter mockery is bearable. Yes, even more, then grievous scourgings can be endured; then the walls of the prison cell do not trouble them, within which Paul and Silas sang praises to God. One look of faith upon Christ, who has suffered this grief in all its dreadful depths for His people, is sufficient to help them bear indignity, scorn, sorrow, and imprisonment. For the Lord Jesus was tempted in all these things in order to succor His people.

Here lies the root of comfort—Christ is a refuge for His people. If in truth we are reproached for the Name of the Lord, may our soul be strengthened in all our grievous sorrow so that, by faith, we may learn to consider our oppression a *light* tribulation. People everywhere may say that those terrible persecutions are a thing of the past, but the people of God know that the enmity against God and His people is not diminished.

The friendship of the world cannot be obtained other than by sacrificing the "life" of God's children. May the Lord keep us from that! May He awaken us out of our sleep, and shake us out of our conformity to the world, so that we do not bow to the idols of this age. Then also mockery, rejection, and imprisonment shall be the portion of those who desire to live godly. Has it not happened in recent times that children of God were sent to prison because they considered the law of God higher than that of man? In our land, which boasts so loudly of Christian liberty, have not honorable women been persecuted, condemned, fined, and imprisoned solely

because they did not want to vote,* whereas they believed God had assigned them to another place than the voting polls? One cabinet member, who calls himself a Christian, had no other answer than that he was called to enforce the law. Oh, where God's honor, laws, people are concerned, everything works together. But even then God can comfort His people, and by faith make them as bold as a young lion. They need expect nothing more of the world than mockery, disdain, and enmity. Even the most religious people often help in distressing the children of God. Indeed, they often stand in the forefront of the enemies, because true faith undermines *their* foundation and condemns *their* life. So great was the hatred for God's church that some were stoned, sawn asunder, tempted, or slain by the sword.

In times past God's people have suffered the most inhumane cruelties. Our history books speak of it, also the history of our fatherland; the souls of those that were slain are under the altar, crying for the day of vengeance. God's people have tasted mockery and stripes, having experienced them. In every grief they were tempted, for together with the tortures they suffered, came the temptations of Satan. Of John Knox—the great Scottish Reformer, who because of his childlike fear of God, feared no man—it is told how he was condemned to the galleys. This dreadful sentence was made even more unbearable by the unceasing vexation of the Roman priest who tried every means to force Knox to apostatize. When a priest held an image of the virgin Mary before him so that he should kiss it, the fearless hero of faith knocked it out of his hands and cast it into the sea, saying, "The virgin is light enough; let her learn to swim." Thus the Lord can strengthen His people and give them liberty, also in the midst of temptation and oppression, so that they do not faint. Whatever misery the world brought upon them, by faith God's people prevailed. They suffered the most dreadful poverty. Sheepskins and goatskins served as clothing; the mountains, dens, and caves of the earth served as homes. Forsaken, oppressed, ill-entreated, God's people wandered about. They were strangers and, as strangers, were scattered over the earth.

The Apostle Peter addressed his epistle to these oppressed ones. A better place was prepared for them. Their citizenship was in heaven. The world was not worthy of them but it seemed to be the reverse. All who are of the world exalt themselves far above God's children. Are they not the ignorant ones, the backward people, born three hundred years too late? In knowledge, in honor and respect, in money and wealth, in short, in all that the natural man esteems, the world is far, far above those who fear the Lord.

* In the Netherlands voting was compulsory.

And still, although the worldling exalts himself ever so high, although he boasts about all that he has and all that he is, it is not in fact as it appears to be, for the world is not worthy of God's people. All that is of the world is nothing compared to the true riches of the children of God. Its wisdom is foolishness with God; its riches are corrupted. Grace teaches us to despise the world just as Moses scorned all Egypt.

Oh, that our eyes may be opened to see and our hearts be renewed to understand; then we will despise what we now so highly prize! The service of sin and worldly pleasure bears the bitter root of death in them. We are called to warn you with increasing seriousness against the service of the world. Boys and girls, hear the warning which also comes to you in this word of the apostle. Oh, do give heed! Give up your worldly friends and relatives, pleasures and honor, so that you may inherit greater riches. We need a new life, a life that is of God, to make us heirs of eternal glory. May that draw us! May the people of God stir us up to a holy jealousy after God! Their blessedness is so great that they were considered not worthy of the world. The world itself cast them out; it could not endure them. In those persecutions the rage of Satan was against the innocence of God's children.

This is written for your encouragement and comfort, people of God. If your portion is disdain and contempt and mockery, then may your soul be strengthened to overcome all the sorrow which you feel and that which saddens you. Greater riches than the honor and glory of the world are prepared for you. Those that were slain escaped the world. The world was not worthy of them. May we experience something of that. How little then would we esteem the world and how our hearts would be strengthened to walk in the path of God's commandments! The poor world knows no more and glories in nothing higher than itself. But by grace God's people have received other riches, and compared to this, all that is of the world is nothing. His people have their riches in heaven where Christ has gone to prepare a place for them. Let the world cast them out but they shall inherit eternal blessings. Their reward shall be great in heaven—of whom the world was not worthy.

CHAPTER XL

Without Us Not Perfect

"And these all, having obtained a good report through faith, received not the promise: God having provided some better thing for us, that they without us should not be made perfect."

—Hebrews 11:39, 40

In these two final verses the apostle summarizes the privilege of all those of whom he spoke in the second verse, saying that by faith the elders obtained a good report. All they who, from the beginning, were privileged to walk by faith had a good report. With many examples the apostle has indisputably shown this. Not only did they, by faith, receive communion with Christ for the remission of sins, but moreover, by the Holy Spirit who alone works faith, they exercised such a strong faith in all oppressions and adversities, that not only was testimony given of it in their own days, but the Lord counted them worthy to testify of their faith in His Word. Neither their work nor their person is praised. They, too, were condemnable sinners by nature, as all men are. But the Holy Spirit testified of the work of God that shone forth in them, to the encouragement of all His people who became partakers with them of like precious faith, and who through many tribulations and through severe strife must walk the pathway of life.

God's ways with all His people are diverse. The strife and the ways in which God's people are afflicted vary greatly. And still it is the same enemy that distresses them all, and it is the same God who leads them all. Abel was killed by his brother; Enoch testified against a world which hardened itself; Noah bore scorn and mockery as he prepared the ark; Abraham lived in a strange land. If you follow the entire list of the heroes of faith mentioned by Paul, you will notice that each one had his portion in the fearful battle which God's people must fight to the end. At one time, the battle is external and visible; at another, it is internal and hidden from the world. However it may be, God's children experience a life-and-death struggle which the world knows not. There can be such distress for them in this strife that it seems as if they will perish one day by the hand of Saul. The Hebrews also had to endure the

dreadful attacks of Satan and his hellish powers. Paul encouraged those who have much strife by the examples of the saints who had conquered. In whatever distress God's people are, whatever attacks they suffer, they may be strengthened by the comfort of this Word. Although the individuals perished, although the enemy slew them, by faith they could triumph even in death. The devil shall never conquer God's people, even if unbelief and desperation plot together with Satan against our flesh and blood. Oh, dejected and oppressed people of God, be strong and let not your heart be dismayed—"No enemy shall Him affright; His adversaries He shall smite."

May we be encouraged as we tread our pathway. I remember an old friend who, in bitter grief, would often say, "I may bear my cross joyfully." That, my readers, is the fruit of the exercise of faith—that we may bear our cross joyfully! But often it is so different from this. The least opposition, the scornful language and slander of the enemy, or whatever is laid in our way, no matter how trivial and insignificant, often makes us sad and discouraged. And still how often in our journey through this life the Lord has shown us that with Him is deliverance, even from death! He who delivered you out of six troubles shall not destroy you in the seventh one. The cloud of witnesses round about us is sufficient proof. To comfort and encourage the church of God, it has pleased the Holy Spirit to speak through Paul of the elect who have obtained a good report through faith. May it be a continual source of strength for us, and may the Lord bless this renewed testimony for this one or that one of His oppressed children by loosening their bonds.

However great the privilege of these witnesses has been, they *have not received the promise.*

In these words the apostle describes the great difference between the Old and the New Testament. Briefly stated, the difference is this: the church of the Old Covenant lived under the promise, and that of the New Covenant under the fulfillment. For indeed, when Paul writes that "the elders" have not received the promise, he refers to that which was promised—to the fulfillment. For no one can deny that God from the beginning has given the promise of Christ. Already in Paradise God promised the Seed of the woman who would crush the head of the serpent. And the promise of the Messiah was repeated more clearly and emphatically every time. With increasing particulars, the coming of Christ was indicated. First He was prophesied as coming from the generation of men; then out of Shem, one of the three sons of Noah. Abraham became the bearer of the promise—"and in Isaac shall thy seed be called." Judah's tribe was chosen, and out of that tribe the generation of David would bring forth the Messiah. The eye of the believer was fixed upon the promise of the coming of the Lord.

For Him their soul hungered and thirsted, as the hart panteth after the waterbrooks. One must be entirely estranged from Scripture to deny that the fathers of the Old Covenant were given the promise of the Immanuel. Although they did not see the day of the Lord, having received the promise, they did receive the promised salvation.

It is not worth refuting what some have made of these words, namely that the promise of eternal salvation was withheld from the believers of the Old Covenant, and that the promises they received were only for this life, and for deliverance from temporal enemies. It is true that those who oppose redemption by the blood of Christ take away salvation for God's people. It cannot be otherwise. This must not escape our attention. Even to the present day many are characterized by this. Would the elect of the Old Covenant be saved in a different way from those of the New Covenant? Could they be saved without Christ? Did they not by union with Him in faith, receive a well-founded hope of eternal salvation? Still they did not receive the actual fulfillment of the coming of Christ—that was prepared for the church of the New Testament, with all the blessings which accompanied His coming. With an eye upon this, Paul writes: "God having provided some better thing for us, that they without us should not be made perfect."

God's eternal, sovereign good pleasure is the basis of this dispensation. There is not the least worthiness in any creature—also not in the elect—that God would give a better dispensation. Only in Himself are all the grounds of salvation, and according to His good pleasure, He has granted various dispensations to His church. In the fulness of time the law has been disarmed of its curse, so that by faith God's elect could stand fast in the liberty wherewith Christ has made them free. For only by faith shall the people of God have the fruit of the dispensation given them. This dispensation is something better, says the apostle. The church was under tutors and governors, but the Lord has removed the yoke from her shoulders. In Christ free access is given for the church to the throne of grace. This is the privilege of the church of the New Covenant, the handwriting of sin having been put away. Without this fulfillment the church is not complete. The Old Covenant cannot exist without the New. That is the meaning of Paul's words, "That they without us should not be made perfect."

The dark and foolish church of Rome sees in these words a porch, a subterranean abode, in which they say the souls of believers of the Old Testament were kept until after the resurrection of Christ. But the entire dogma of such an abode is contrary to Scripture. Moreover, Paul is not speaking of the state of the soul after death, but the state of the soul in this life. Upon the basis of

the eternal suretyship of Christ, the believers of the Old Testament entered into glory, just the same as those who died after the resurrection of Christ. But in this life there is a difference in ministration, and this entails the exercise of faith. So "without us" means without the redemption wrought in time by Christ; without this they would not be perfect. It is one and the same church, one dove of Christ, which is redeemed from the curse of the law and brought to the state of perfection. The Church is perfect, not in the sense that they are, already in this life above all sin and trouble, but in the sense that they have come to such maturity in Christ that they have put away childish things.

The entire argument of the apostle is an approbation of the state of the New Covenant above that of the Old Covenant, namely, the glory Christ has merited and brought about in order that by faith His people shall partake of that liberty.

By nature we are entirely outside of the covenant. We have no part in Christ. He is a stranger to us. We have not experienced His ministry. Oh, that it may affect us, being without Christ in the world! For we are all traveling to eternity, and without a Surety we shall not be able to meet God. May the Lord grant us to abhor all our own righteousnesses as filthy rags and to learn that the state of sin is the state of death, so that by faith we might seek life and reconciliation in Him alone. All that is outside of Him is insufficient. What precious instructions lie in the words of the apostle, especially for the people of God!

The Lord has given us a rich, abundant ministry, but how often the faith needed to rightly partake of the fruit of this ministry is lacking. How many of God's children are held by the bands of the law as though it had never been stripped of its curse! How many are in great fear because of their sins although Christ has accomplished everything for them! But this is very dark and hidden for them. Although at times they might look upon Christ and embrace Him in the promise, yet they expect nothing but God's justice and the sentence of death. Their conscience condemns them, and the rest which is in Christ for God's people is taken from them. In a word, their faith is too weak to partake of the liberty of that better part that God has laid away. Oh, people of God, may the Lord, according to His good pleasure, cause your day of salvation to dawn! May there be a restless pressing after Christ, so that you by faith may have everything in Him alone. The true union with Christ shall make you free from every curse of the law, and that so completely as if you yourself had finished everything that Christ has accomplished for you. Oh, let us not build upon any experiences outside of Christ! May the discovering light of the Holy Spirit make us poor and ready for Christ who has obtained reconciliation for sin and has removed iniquity from His people.

In Christ is everything necessary for life. May He draw our hearts continually to Himself, so that we cannot live without Him. To that end may He bless our oppressions and adversities. For God's people must be continually emptied so that they can draw their life out of Christ alone. Often the Lord desires to use warfare, the enmity of the world, the assaults of Satan, and deep ways of oppression to glorify Himself in His people and to grant them the deliverance of faith. May this comfort us in our adversities.

Finally, God's Church is *one* from the beginning of the world till the last one shall be gathered in. What a multitude there shall one day be before the throne! "Without us . . . not . . . perfect." The number that God alone has counted, and which remains innumerable for us, shall be full. No hoof shall be left behind. However sore the battle may be, the Church of God shall one day conquer through the blood of the Lamb. Whatever dark providences may still come through the woes of world-wide distress, the Church is going to glory to meet Christ her Head! There the Church shall be one where faith shall be changed to sight, and eternal deliverance from sin, oppression, and all enemies shall be received in perfection. There all God's people shall be one, no matter out of which dispensation they shall come—one people—for they all are bought with the blood of the Lamb. However highly the Word of God praises the saints of the Old Testament, whatever glorious testimony the Holy Spirit gives of their faith, they are saved by grace alone. Without us they shall not be perfect. The number determined by God shall be complete. The Lord shall bring them in from the north and from the south, from the east and from the west, to praise and glorify Him perfectly and undisturbed.

